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MAHE.

The Prince who
Learnt a Trade
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of
India**

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**Saga
of
Vishnu**

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**Mukesh
keeps
a
goat**

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**CONTESTS
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**Editor
VISWAM**

**Editorial Advisors
RUSKIN BOND
MANOJ DAS**

**Consultant Editor
K. RAMAKRISHNAN**

**For booking space in this
magazine please contact :**

Chennai

Abirami Swamy

Ph : 044-234 7384, 234 7399

Bangalore

Sudhir Salaria

Ph:080-559 8859/555 0821/524 5265

Kolkata

Asish Laha

Ph : 033-234 9529

Delhi

Mona Bhatia

Ph:011-651 5111/656 5513/656 5516

Mumbai

Shakeel Mulla

Ph : 022-266 1599/266 1946/265 3057

ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:

Chandamama Magazine Division

No. 82, Defence Officers Colony,
Ekkatuthangal, Chennai - 600 097

Phone : 234 7384, 234 7399

Fax : 234 7384

e-mail : chandamama@chandamama.org

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Founded by

B. Nagi Reddi and Chakrapani

Let Children Unite

When Gujarat was hit by an earthquake, taking a toll of thousands of innocent lives, nobody counted how many of them belonged to a particular religion, caste, or creed. The fact that so many lives were lost was enough to touch the emotional chords of those who escaped a disaster of that magnitude.

If a tragedy could unite humanity, irrespective of colour, caste, or creed, to support fellow beings, it only goes to prove that human values like love and compassion are still cherished and nourished by many. What should then prevent people from living in harmony for the betterment of human life? Calamities—natural or manmade—are products of greed and abuse.

We are all shocked by the recent happenings in schools in one of the most developed nations. Investigations turn the finger to one point: abuse of one's freedom. We are left to wonder whether the modern education system has failed to achieve its objective, to help the growing generation imbibe human values. Present-day schooling only tries to impart information—in other words, to feed one's brain and not the heart with ideas like dignity of labour or concern for another. Education should aim at developing character and discipline. In their absence, civilisation will only go back to the stone-age where might alone was right, where the law of the jungle prevailed.

In one of the incidents referred to above, a teenager was able to persuade a schoolmate to drop her weapon and intention to hurt another. In India we often hear of children taking courage into their hands to prevent calamities—accidental or pre-meditated. Like the 12-year-old girl, who prevented a bank being burgled and saved the life of her watchman-father. This is another instance of a child with an uncorrupt mind.

Chandamama, which has all along been a friend of children, appeals to them on the occasion of the World Environment Day, to come together to create an ideal environment—both clean and green—to enjoy a life of peace and happiness.



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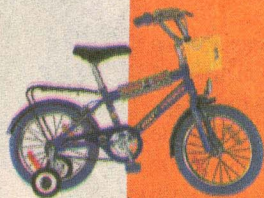
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BORN THIS MONTH

P. C. Mahalanobis

If you were a statistics freak, you would have heard of multivariate analysis, interpenetrating network of samples (IPNS) in sample surveys, and fractal graphical analysis. These techniques for calculating and analysing data were developed by an Indian – Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis.

This great statistician was responsible for putting India on the statistical world map. P. C. Mahalanobis was born on June 29, 1893. He took his B.Sc (Honours) from Calcutta University in 1912 and M.A. in Mathematics from Cambridge University. It was during this time that he was accidentally introduced to statistics. His tutor, W. H. Macaulay, recommended that he read the latest editions of popular books on statistics like *Biometrika* and *Biometric Tables*.

His tutor was quite right. The books fascinated Mahalanobis, who developed a lasting interest in the subject. He returned to India in 1915. He took up the job of a lecturer in physics at the Presidency College, Calcutta, and continued to study statistics whenever he found the time.

In 1917, when the academicians of Calcutta University decided to bring in changes to the examination system of the university, they approached Mahalanobis for help. He used his skills in statistical analysis to study the question papers, students, and teachers, and came up with recommendations that were accepted and implemented.

From then on, he was consulted on various subjects, like anthropology, epidemiology, demography, and meteorology. In 1931, he established the Indian Statistical Institute at Barrackpore, near Kolkata.

When the Planning Commission was established in 1950, Mahalanobis was appointed its first Vice-Chairman. The Prime Minister was the Chairman.

A major contribution of Mahalanobis is what is known as Mahalanobis's



Distance. This is used for measuring the separation between two geographical locations on the surface of the earth.

In 1949, Mahalanobis became Chairman of the Indian National Income Committee and was responsible for launching the National Sample Survey. He was elected a member of the Royal Society in 1945. Prof. Mahalanobis was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 1968 for his contribution to the field of Science. He died on June 28, 1972.

MIR IS NO MORE

The Russian space station Mir received its “death signal” and came to a fiery end on March 23, fifteen years after it was sent up in 1986.

Mir was designed to live for only three years, but as it proved its worth for space research, it was given a longer life. During these 15 years, it was manned by as many as 104 Russian cosmonauts and American astronauts at one time or another; nearly 16,500 experiments were conducted; and it went into orbit more than 86,300 times.

Mir was launched as a Soviet space adventure. After the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia had to bear a major share of its expenditure and the country found it hard to maintain the space station which was costing 250 million dollars every year. Russia then decided to join hands with its erstwhile space rival, the USA, and astronauts were sent to work in the space station. It thus became a symbol of peace and co-operation between the two countries. The astronauts brought space habitation technology back



home to help the USA build an international space station which is already in orbit.

The 140-tonne Mir's splash down in the Pacific was a memorable spectacle, besides being a flawless operation by the ground control. Russian engineers, who had established their technological prowess, did not make any mistake “in any single step, not for even a millimetre”. The huge fabrication of metal modules and solar panels broke up into nearly 1,500 pieces.

MORE ON MIR

✦ During its 15-year life in space, Mir was inhabited for 12 years and 6 months. Cosmonaut Valeri Polyakov spent 437 consecutive days, while astronaut Shannon Lucid stayed for 188 days - the longest stay by a woman.

✦ When the space station entered the earth's atmosphere, among the materials that were burnt up were a library of 100 books, which included a copy each of the Bible and the Koran, and a photo of Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, besides 11 tonnes of scientific equipment.

✦ Even two days before Mir was destroyed, Russian legislators made a plea to President Vladimir Putin to allow the space station to stay in orbit, saying it had not yet outlived its usefulness. Among the MPs were two former cosmonauts.

Shots of Mars from earth

Student-scientists Shaleen Harialka (15), Tanmay Hiwadkar (13), and Vikas Sarangadhara (10) of India joined six other school children from other parts of the world in “shooting” Mars with cameras at NASA's

Mars global spacecraft laboratory in Malin. The three are reported to have captured some fascinating images of the planet, including dunes and valleys, the polar ice cap, and evidences of water layers.

A 5-year-old completes 50!

Dennis the Menace has remained a 5-year-old for the past fifty years! This most lovable comic character from the brush of Henry “Hank” Ketcham has adorned the pages of several newspapers and magazines all over the world. The Menace was fashioned from none other than Ketcham’s own son, Dennis. When the boy was four, his mother one day



rushed up to Henry, saying: “Your son is a menace!” A film animator then, Ketcham

(now 81) was inspired to create, in 1951, Dennis the Menace along with his parents the Mitchells, their neighbours, the Wilsons, pal Joey, and dog Ruff and placed them in Wichita in Kansas. Ketcham decided that his “midget mountain of mischief” would never grow up. The Menace has always been a favourite with children and grown-ups alike.

Quake drill

School children in Gujarat are being given a quake-drill to train them how to evacuate from buildings. The warning bell—unlike the usual indication of the beginning of school hours, periods, recess or the final dispersal, will tell them first and foremost not to panic, but move out of their seats in an orderly manner and go to the open field with the class teacher following the last student. The principal will be the last to reach the open ground. After some rehearsals, a final practice session at an Ahmedabad school saw the thousand odd children and staff lined up in the open in just one minute.

On May 1 last year, a baby was born in India to take the population

of the country to a billion. The first phase of Census 2001 was completed by midnight of February 28. The preliminary statistics released after one month shows that the population has gone up by another 27,015,247 in ten months. The number of males, as on March 1, has been computed as 531,277,078 and females 495,738,169. India remains the second country in the world—the other is China—where the population has crossed the one billion mark.

Literacy in India among the people aged above 6

A BILLION PLUS

years has been fixed as 65.83 per cent, with 75.85 per cent for the male

population and 54.16 per cent among females. Among the states, Kerala’s literacy percentage is 90.92. The second position goes to Mizoram (88.49), while the Laccadives take the third place (87.52).

Between February 9 and 28, some 1,700,000 enumerators and supervisors visited a total of 200 million households in 640,100 villages and 5,200 towns to gather details of the people under different heads. Census 2001, incidentally, was the 14th since the first Census held in 1871.

A PICK FROM OUR MAIL BAG

Reader K.S. Karthik writes from Nellore:

I love to read stories and facts in *Chandamama*. I have written on strange coincidences. Will you publish them?

This came from Janani Rangarajan, Kottur, Chennai:

I am a regular reader of *Chandamama*. I thank you and your team for providing us with a magazine which is full of fun and information.

Reader D. Shrikant, of Naval Base, Kochi, writes:

I and my family members are regular readers of your esteemed magazine. We have always enjoyed reading the same.

One of our regular contributors, M. Kameswara Rao of Vijayawada, writes:

Your readers find the number of stories coming down in recent times. Please avoid giving History and G.K.

Mrs. Veena Adige writes from Khopoli, Maharashtra:

I have been reading *Chandamama* since my childhood, and now my children read it.

This came from Bulbul Jha of Guna, Madhya Pradesh:

I am a student of Class VIII. I am reading *Chandamama* for the last five years. I like it very much. It contains many educational and historical stories. The stories and pictures are marvellous.

Reader P. Rajan Babu of Ranga Reddy, Andhra Pradesh, writes:

I have been a regular reader of *Chandamama* for 25 years. The magazine is good, except that it is overloaded with historical matter and features. Please give more stories.



The 4-part "India in the 20th Century" was featured to mark the advent of a new century and a new millennium. While it was generally appreciated, some of our readers felt that we should have given more stories. The number of stories in this issue, we are sure, would make them happy. -Editor



His Choice

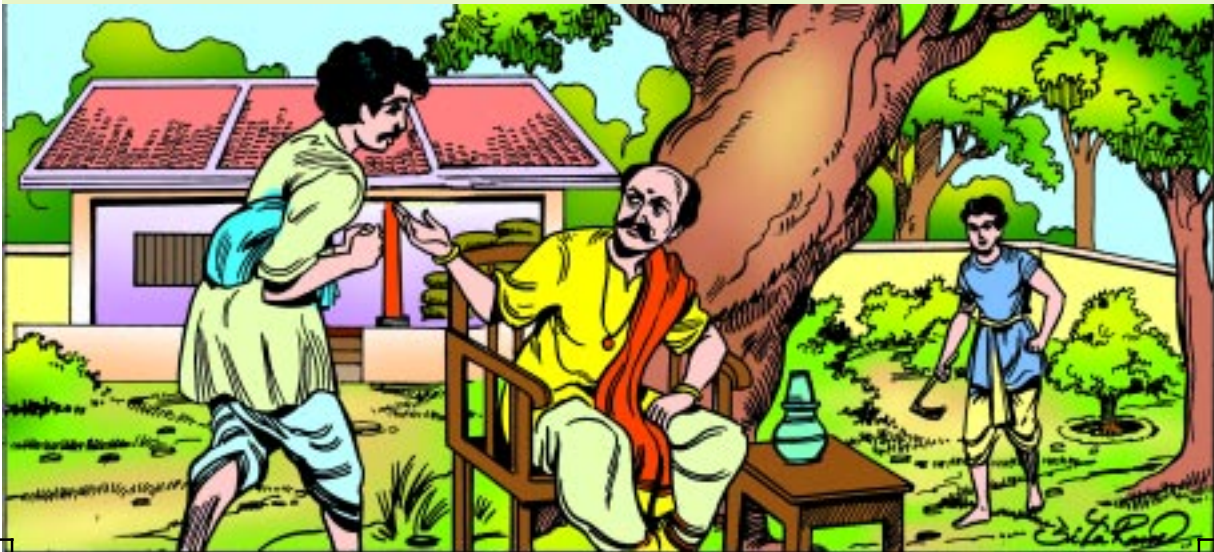
Madhav was in need of a farm hand. A friend sent him two men, Keshav and Gopal, to choose from. The landlord decided to try them before he made a choice. He took them to the farm and gave them some directions. “Whatever implements you need are in that shed. You may start work now.”

Keshav and Gopal began working in right earnest. Before it was noon, Madhav went up to the farm to see what the two men had done. The moment Keshav saw the landlord coming, he ran to fetch a chair and stool from the shed. He then went and brought a tender coconut, cut it open, and handed it to Madhav. He drank from it and soon afterwards went back home.

In the evening, both Keshav and Gopal turned up at the landlord’s residence. He paid them their wages and said: “Gopal, you may come for work from tomorrow.”

Keshav protested. “O master! When you came to the farm, Gopal never even raised his face to greet you, while I received you and even offered a drink. Still...”

“Yes,” said Madhav, “Gopal continued with his work while you were only trying to please me. If I had wanted a drink, I would have asked one of you to fetch it. I think Gopal is more responsible, and I can depend on him.”





☞ *My father snores in his sleep. What causes snoring?*

- **Ramya Vasisht, Jabbalpore**

Snoring is actually the sound which air makes when it passes over certain parts of the mouth and throat. When a person lies on his back with his mouth open, a vibration takes place, and if he were to turn on his side, this vibration or snoring is stopped. People also snore when their throat and nasal passages are blocked with, say, mucus. Children, generally, do not snore, unless they suffer from a bad cold.

☞ *Newlyweds usually go on a honeymoon. What is the origin of this custom?*

- **G.Bhaskar Rao, Tenali**

Long, long ago, in Germany, it is believed, people used to make a drink from honey, which would be consumed for thirty days after the wedding. This period came to be called a 'honey month', which has come to be popularly called honeymoon!

☞ *The famous dance form of Japan Kabuki is believed to have been adapted from Kerala's Kathakali. What is Kabuki?*

- **Radhamani Variar, Alwaye**

Kabuki simply means the art of singing and dancing. Like Kathakali, which is a form of dance drama, Kabuki is a type of play. These plays are a string of exciting events; some of these events revolve round magic and mystery. Again, like in Kathakali, the artistes don elaborate costumes and wear heavy make-up, with heroes sporting white and villains red colour on their face. The Kabuki has only male artistes (in Kathakali, once upon a time, women's roles were enacted by male players), employing mime actions. There is background music from the beginning to the end, while the songs are sung by the artistes themselves. In Kathakali, the actors do not sing. The story is narrated through songs to the accompaniment of a harmonium and one or two percussion instruments and cymbals.

**This may
interest
you**

The longest sentence in literature can be found in *Les Miserables*, the French classic by Victor Hugo. It has 823 words, 93 commas, 51 semi-colons, and four dashes, and runs into three full pages!



New tales of
King Vikram
and the Vetala

Respect for guru's judgement

King Vikramaditya once again made his way to the tree where the Vetala hung on a branch with the corpse. He climbed the tree, placed the corpse on his shoulder, and made his way through the edge of the forest to the desolate cremation ground. As he walked, the Vetala possessing the corpse spoke: "O King," he said, "children born in royal households are taught the arts and sciences that require a lot of courage, and this makes them hard working and determined. Such people are as persistent as you are and work with



(which means a full moon night) because she was born on a full moon night. The king was very fond of his daughter and also proud of her. He also knew that he would have to be very careful when he chose a groom for her, because the boy would not only have to be a proper match for his daughter but capable of ruling a kingdom. In fact, he had in mind his own nephew Shruthavarma, the heir to the throne of Uddhanda.

Shruthavarma and Kaumudi had studied together under the Rajaguru Mukundacharya. Manimanth, the minister's son, too, joined them. Kaumudi,

determination towards their goal. But it can also be seen that some people lose heart at the last moment and give up before they reach their goal.

"This is about something that happened a long time ago to Shruthavarma who was then the crown prince of the kingdom of Uddhanda. Let me tell you his story to illustrate what I have just told you." The Vetala then began his narration.

Marunthavarma was the King of Praval. He had an only daughter who was both beautiful and very intelligent. She was named Kaumudi

like the boys, got trained in archery, fencing, and other martial arts. The three of them thus spent a lot of their childhood together. Manimanth and Kaumudi enjoyed debating with each other. In fact, Mukundacharya was very impressed with some of their arguments and their ideas. Shruthavarma, too, joined them sometimes, but he was not as bright as they were.

King Marunthavarma observed the growing friendship between the two young men and his daughter with some misgiving. He suspected that Kaumudi had an extra affection for Manimanth. He feared, if this

was not checked, he would face many problems. Would Manimanth be worthy enough to succeed him in Pravala? He wanted to know his daughter's mind for certain before he took any action. So he got a close friend of hers called Malathi to talk to Kaumudi. Kaumudi disclosed that she was not interested in marrying Shruthavarma and looked upon him only as a dear cousin. She was in love with Manimanth. She felt he alone would make her happy in every way. She also did not wish to leave Pravala and live in another country. If she married Manimanth, they could rule Pravala together.

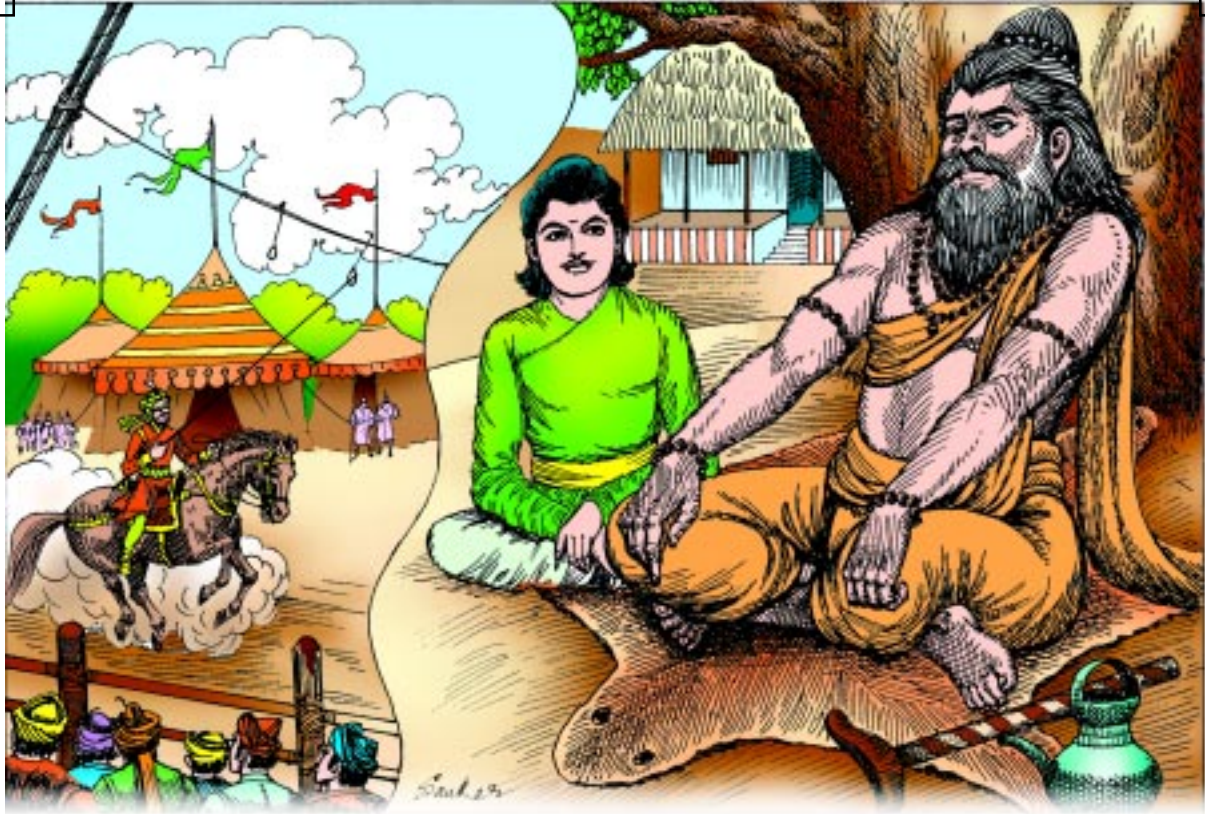
Marunthavarma was not the only one who had sensed the growing love between Manimanth and Kaumudi. Shruthavarma also realised which way the wind was blowing. From their childhood he had assumed that Kaumudi would one day be his wife. Now he felt betrayed and upset. He thought about the way matters had developed and then discussed them with his uncle, King Marunthavarma.

The king wondered how he would solve the problem. He then called for his nephew one day and advised him to speak to Manimanth frankly. He said: "Tell Manimanth that you have realised he is in love with Kaumudi. Tell him you are

much more in love with her and, therefore, the only way out of the dilemma is to fight it out like honourable men. Whoever wins should claim Kaumudi's hand. Then use all your strength and power to defeat Manimanth. If I were to find that you're having problems, I'll think of a way to ensure that you win."

Shruthavarma thought over his uncle's suggestion. He said: "The truth is that Manimanth and I are equal in strength and skill, but his self-confidence is such that it seems to give him greater stamina and power. Let's do one thing. In the Aravalli ranges nearby, there is a martial arts school run by the great





guru Krishnachandra. Let me go and study under him for a while and improve my skills. After that we'll do as you say."

Marunthavarma agreed and Shruthavarma went to guru Krishnachandra to learn whatever he could.

He worked with great determination and concentration for six months. After the course was over, when it was time for Shruthavarma to leave, the guru said: "You told me the King of Pravala is your uncle. Do you know his minister's son Manimanth?"

Shruthavarma was surprised to hear Manimanth's name being mentioned. "Yes, I do know him very

well. But why do you ask?" he said curiously.

"Well," said the guru, "I often roam about in disguise to know what is happening in the countryside. One day, I happened to attend the Spring Festival held at Pravala.

"There I saw an exhibition of strength by Manimanth. I haven't seen a brighter man or a better fighter than he. Not many have that kind of ability. When you see him, please tell him that he has an invitation to come here anytime."

Shruthavarma was silenced for a while by these words. Then he said: "I had also taken part in the competition that day."

The guru was surprised. “Really? Were you there?” he asked, and then smiled.

The next day Shruthavarma went back to his uncle at Pravala and said: “My confidence and skills have certainly improved a lot in these last six months, but I feel it would not be fair to go against Kaumudi’s wishes. So it might be better if you permitted her to marry Manimanth.”

The Vetala stopped the story there and addressed King Vikramaditya. “O King! Shrutha-varma spent six hard months improving his skill. Then why did he lose heart at the last minute and give up his goal?

“Wasn’t he foolish to give up when he had almost reached his goal? If you know the answers to my questions and still do not want

to speak, be warned, your head will break into a thousand pieces!”

Vikramaditya spoke at once. “Shruthavarma respected guru Krishnachandra and his judgement deeply. When he heard him praise Manimanth, he realised exactly how good a person Manimanth was. When Shruthavarma said he had also taken part in the same event, the guru did not say anything. So, he realised that there was no comparison between him and Manimanth. Being a realist, he knew he could never win against Manimanth and so decided not to make a try. He was not a coward but a man of judgement who could face reality.”

As soon as the king spoke, the Vetala vanished with the corpse and once again hung himself from the same ancient tree.



A Hodja story

THE PERFECT WIFE

Hodja Naseeruddin was sharing a pot of coffee with a friend, when another one came along and greeted him with great joy. "I'm getting married next week," he said. "I'm so happy. But, Hodja, why haven't you ever thought of getting married?"

"Oh, I did, I did, but it was a long time ago," replied the Hodja.

"Why? What happened? Didn't you find anyone?" asked his friend.

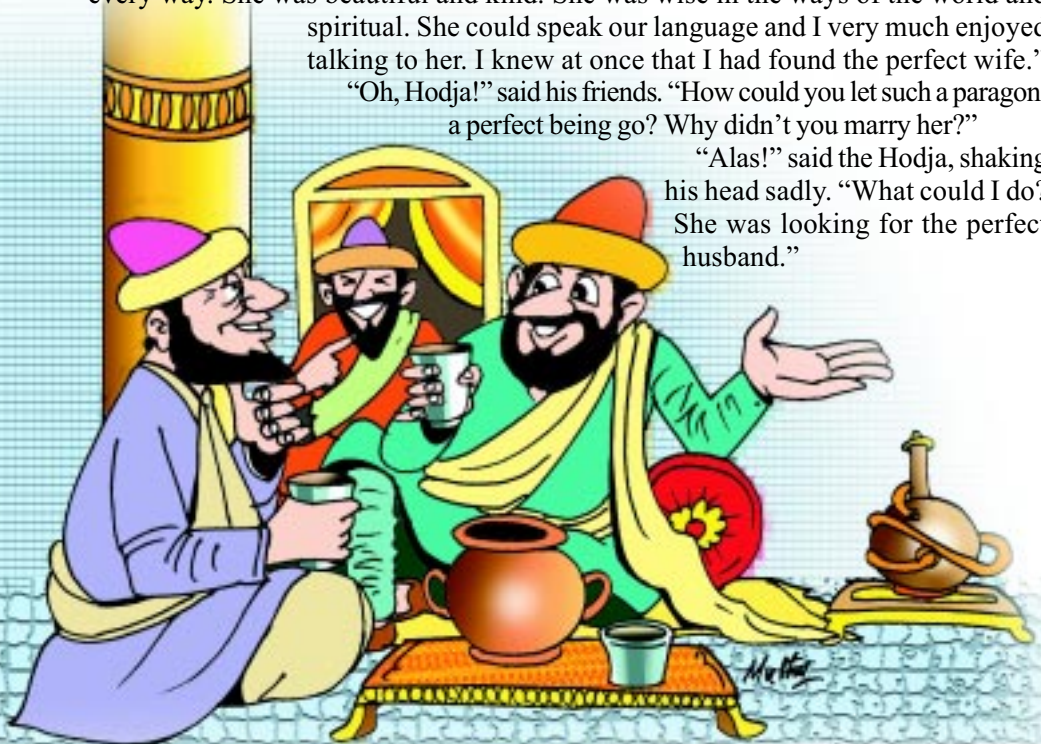
"No, it wasn't like that. When I was young, I set out once to find the perfect wife. I travelled many miles over mountains and through valleys. Finally, in a little place perched on a mountainside, I met a beautiful woman. She was wise as well as kind, but she didn't know much about the world. I thought she wouldn't be able to help me with my every day affairs, and so I didn't marry her. I travelled further and came to a big town. There I met a truly beautiful woman. She was wise and kind, also she knew how to get on in the world. She seemed almost perfect."


"Then? What went wrong?" the two men listening to the Hodja queried together. "Why didn't you marry her?"

"Well, she couldn't speak our language and I couldn't talk to her," answered the Hodja. "So, I thought, what was the point in marrying someone I couldn't talk to? Then, I went even further and reached Egypt. There I found her. She was perfect in every way. She was beautiful and kind. She was wise in the ways of the world and spiritual. She could speak our language and I very much enjoyed talking to her. I knew at once that I had found the perfect wife."

"Oh, Hodja!" said his friends. "How could you let such a paragon, a perfect being go? Why didn't you marry her?"

"Alas!" said the Hodja, shaking his head sadly. "What could I do? She was looking for the perfect husband."





CLEAN SWEEP

'Ah! Home at last! It'd be great to go for a walk in the park near home. How green and cool it has always been!' thought Siddharth as the plane landed at the Indira Gandhi International Airport at New Delhi.

Siddharth was returning home after spending five years at the University of North Carolina, U.S.A. His parents had come to the airport to fetch him. They set out for Padpadganj, the colony where they had lived all their life. Siddharth was longing to reach his house fast. Memories of happy childhood days in the cool environment of his colony rushed back to him.

But he got the shock of his life as soon as he set his foot down from the car. This was not the place he remembered. The whole area had changed. Where was that *babool* tree he remembered so well? And where was the *gulmohur* tree that used to shower its flaming orange blossoms all around Sudhir *chacha's* house? Today, the place was strewn around with litter and rubbish. Armies of flies buzzed around the litter heap.

Just then, Mrs. Sharma, their neighbour, came out of her house, greeted

June 2001



Siddharth, threw the garbage around the bin, and went away. He was stunned. Nothing had prepared him for such a sight.

All the buildings looked old, thought Siddharth. They all had a thick, black coat of soot and grime.

Siddharth fought down a feeling of disappointment as he entered his house. He could not digest all these changes. The place was not what he remembered and what he had expected to see.

That evening, Siddharth started feeling sick and uneasy. "Aouch... Aouch..." he started sneezing. "Too much dust!" he commented.

But his parents just laughed. "You'll get used to it, my boy!" said his father.

When his mother served him his dinner, Siddharth noticed rashes all over her hands. She brushed aside his questions, saying that they were just minor problems and many women in Delhi had allergies like that.

It was with a very heavy heart that Siddharth went to bed. In the middle of

the night, he woke up to the sound of voices. The lights had been switched on in his parents' room. He went in to enquire. His mother was handing over some medicines to his father, who had suddenly developed a bout of asthma.

That's it; Siddharth could no longer accept these things. He was contemplating his options. He had to take some action and fast, too.

Early in the morning, during breakfast, he began: "Ma, Pappaji, there's something I have got to tell you. I've an offer of a job from a leading software company in America. Initially, I wasn't very keen on taking it up...but now I'm not quite sure! I think I'll take up that job. I can't spend my life in this filth!"

Siddharth's parents were shocked. They had hoped that he would settle down to a job here in Delhi and live with them during their old age. They tried to coax him to reconsider his decision. He was moved by their plight, but he could not live in such a filthy and polluted place.

"Why don't you do something about this?" he asked them. "Look how dirty our colony is. Look at those flies in the garbage bin. Why did Pappa get asthma last night? It's all because of the filth we live in."

Siddharth continued as he traced a blank look on their face. "The asthma

Foul air

Did you know that Mumbai is the fourth most polluted city in the world?



A Grim Tale



Rainwater in Thailand's industrial areas is often too acidic to be consumed. The Public Health Ministry of that country advises

rain harvesters to wait for an hour after a shower starts before they collect rainwater for use.

attack you had last night was because of the polluted air we breathe in. Earlier, you remember, there were many trees in the area, but today, I hardly see any. Now the air is so polluted that I dread going out. The rashes on Ma's skin are also because of the pollution and dust. Although you've all been affected, you don't seem to have realised the importance of clean air. Each one of us must do our bit to control pollution."

All his reasoning fell on deaf ears. His parents were cynical about changing the scenario. They cited the example of Mrs. Sharma next door, who always threw the garbage outside the bin. What could you do with such people, they questioned.

Siddharth could not believe that there could be no change. He wanted to stay home, but he did not want a filthy home either. He decided to take action. If there was no improvement in three months, then he would go back to the USA.

That evening, he found a group of ten children playing in the vacant plot opposite his house. He had a great idea. He went up to them and offered some chocolates. "Are they American chocolates, *bhaiya*?" asked one little fellow.

"They are!" answered Siddharth.

"Is America really very beautiful?" asked Minu.

Chandamama



"It is," he replied.

"Are you going back to America? India is a very dirty place, isn't it?" asked Jhinnu.

Siddharth looked at their earnest young faces and suddenly replied in a strong voice: "No, I'm not going back to America. I'm going to make India into another America!"

"How can you do that?" asked Cheeku, the youngest of the lot.

"It's very easy," said Siddharth. "But I can't do it alone. I need your help!"

The children were excited. Rarely did anyone seek their help in any matter! They code-named it Operation Beautiful





pleasant. One day, he asked his young friends, “How far is your school from here? Do you need to go there by your cars? Why don’t you go on your bicycles?”

“Do you know how much this would help our environment?” he continued. “Why should ten cars go to the same destination from the same place? All of you can go in any one car. This will reduce the emission of carbon monoxide from vehicles. It’ll also save petrol,” he added.

Six months passed. Siddharth forgot all about returning to the USA. He had found something worthwhile to live for. He found a decent job in New Delhi. And weren’t his parents happy!

His gang of ten made new forays in environment conservation every day. Recently they banned the use of plastic and polythene carrybags in the colony. They had realised that these are non-biodegradable and harmful to the environment. If you go to Padpadganj today, you’ll see Cheeku, Jhinnu, and Minu and Tiku carrying only cloth or jute bags for shopping!

G. Vidhya

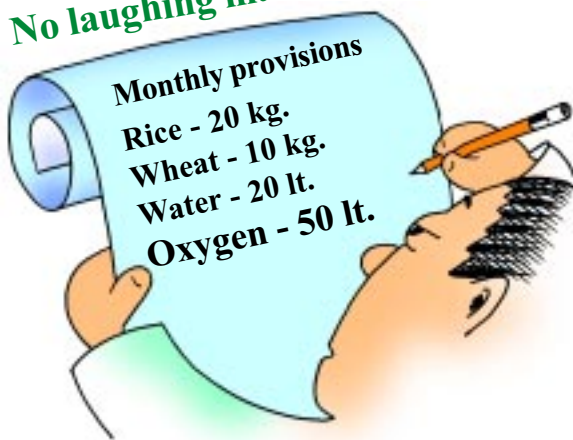
and set about beautifying Padpadganj. They met Siddharth every evening after school. Soon they chalked out a plan of action.

The first thing they did was to plant trees. They bought saplings and planted them in and around the colony. Each one took turns to water them. Then they collected a small fund and purchased brooms and a few other cleaning articles. They went about sweeping the colony thoroughly.

In just three months, the colony looked spotlessly clean. The likes of Mrs. Sharma were now embarrassed to throw rubbish on the streets. Some women in the colony, inspired by the children, raised small plants and saplings in pots in their balconies. One woman actually created quite an impressive roof garden!

Now Siddharth was happy. He had made life in Padpadganj bearable, in fact,

No laughing matter !?!





LIFE FLOWS AGAIN



Vijay was running as fast as his little legs could carry him. He was not worried that he might dash into somebody. Tears streamed out of his eyes, as he looked at the limp body of Mani, his pet dog that he was carrying in his arms. 'How could this happen to my best friend?' he thought sadly.

He was there soon. Darting into the vet's clinic, Vijay stood panting before Dr. Sundar. "My Mani, sir. We were all playing when he suddenly fell down, frothing from his mouth. Please make him well soon, sir!" Vijay burst into sobs.

"Don't worry, my dear boy. He seems to be poisoned. What did you give him to eat? What did he drink?" asked the vet, as he examined the dog lying on his table.

"Poison? Who could have poisoned my dear Mani? He's everybody's pet, sir!" Vijay shuddered. "We were playing by the riverside when Mani drank from the river," said Vijay.

"Hmm...so it's the river that has poisoned him. I should have listened to my friend's warning," Sundar thought loudly.

June 2001



He swiftly administered some antidote. But it was of no use, and the dog died. Vijay wept loudly as he gathered Mani in his arms. Sundar was now worried about a graver matter. The fear that the polluted river might take a heavier toll nagged him. He wanted to caution the villagers, but he knew it would trigger off a major controversy.



When the decision to start a knitwear company in the village was made a decade ago, Dr. Sundar had vehemently protested. He had formed an eco club along with a band of youngsters, and the group tried to educate the villagers on the various problems the industrial unit would create. But nobody took them seriously and the group's voice was drowned in the vociferous approval of the villagers. The factory builder was a local man with

political influence. He ensured that no finger could be raised against him.

Sundar was shocked when he found the villagers silently agreeing to their agricultural lands being acquired for the factory. Many villagers had been happy with the hefty sum paid for their lands. Most of them even gave up cultivation and joined the factory as employees. Apart from the factory, residences for the labourers and other technical and administrative staff who would work in the factory were also constructed. Trees were felled and farmlands turned into plots. And the village was transformed.

The riverbank had once been the haunt of picnic-goers. Songbirds made music for them, while squirrels scurried about in happy abandon. After a long picnic, people would fish in the river and go back with a big catch for dinner. This river was the



Dire fire

**Rivers on fire?
Sounds
incredible, but it
happened really.**



The Cuyahoga River that flows through Cleveland, Ohio, caught fire in 1969. The city is one of USA's leading industrial centres. The factories have been pumping out chemical effluents into the river for many years now. But nobody seems to have learnt from mistakes. And now the polluted river has been classified a major fire hazard.

only source of water for at least ten villages in the neighbourhood. But the factory changed the whole scenario.

The effluents from the factory were directly drained into the river and the fish population dwindled. Many a villager had seen dead birds in their fields. And the yield from the paddy fields diminished. The villagers did not realise that it was the effluents from the factory that affected the delicate eco fabric of the village. Over the recent years, there had been increasing complaints of asthma, wheezing and lung diseases among the locals. Since everybody used the river water for bathing, skin rashes and itches, irritation in the eyes and nose had become a common phenomenon. Though they promptly visited the doctor and took medicines, nobody seemed to associate these happenings with the factory. All they needed was some money to drag on their miserable lives.

Every now and then, Dr. Sundar and his team tried to broach the topic with

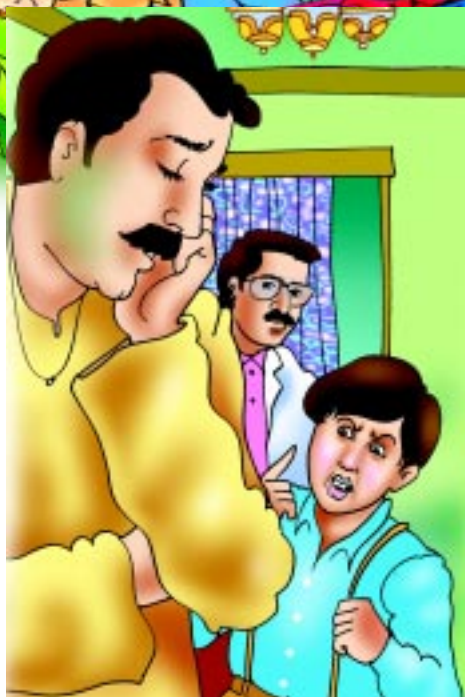


the villagers, but they cleverly evaded the issue. And today, Vijay's dog had been the first victim. 🐶 🐶 🐶

'It is just the right time to broach the subject to Rajan,' thought Sundar. Vijay was the son of Rajan, the factory owner. Since he was directly affected, Rajan might now look at the problem from a different angle. Sundar told the eco club members of his plan. He wanted the youngsters to join him, and the group charted out the steps they would ask Rajan to take. They would suggest that the factory treated the effluents and recycled it for industrial use.

When they reached the Rajan





household, Sundar heard somebody wailing. It was Vijay. He lay curled on a sofa. His father was by his side, trying to console him. When Vijay saw Sundar and the others, he stopped crying abruptly and went inside. Rajan looked up inquiringly.

“It’s about what happened to Mani, sir. You don’t want such a thing to happen to a kid or a villager, do you?” asked Sundar.

The words stabbed Rajan and he winced. He invited the team inside and offered them seats.

Dr. Sundar started explaining how the factory had polluted the area and how lives were affected.

Suddenly Vijay rushed into the room. He had been listening to Sundar.

“So you killed Mani, dad? You’re a murderer. Bring me back my Mani, now!” he shouted like a maniac at his father. “Aren’t you ashamed of killing a helpless

little dog that always loved and served you? From when did you turn a killer, dad? One day, you’ll kill me too, won’t you?” he yelled and pointed his finger accusingly at his father.

Dr. Sundar went up to Vijay and took hold of him. He tried to calm him down. “Don’t accuse your father, Vijay. He didn’t do it deliberately. And I’m sure he’ll make amends.”

Rajan was visibly shaken and jolted. So far, only a handful of people had been pointing their fingers at him. But now, his own son was accusing him of murder. Rajan could take it no more. He decided to carry out the plans suggested by Sundar and his team and set things right. That was the least he could do.

Sundar saw the determination in Rajan’s eyes. He knew that the river would certainly be given a new lease of life. And the village community could breathe easy again.

No laughing matter !?! - Sukesini



Saga of India

Glimpses of a great civilisation –
its glorious quest for Truth through the ages

17. The Grand Procession of Chariots



It was the birthday of Prasad, a friend of Sandip, and he had arranged for a large tray of ice-cream cups to be distributed among Professor Devnath's Sunday audience. Though it was summer, the afternoon breeze was refreshing and the children were in a specially happy mood. After they had greeted Prasad, Chameli said, putting her arms around the professor's shoulders, "Grandpa, since this is a special Sunday, we must have a special story from you."

"But, Chameli, has he ever told us anything that is not special for us?" objected Sandip.

Chameli was about to respond to her brother when the professor intervened. "Let it be something which

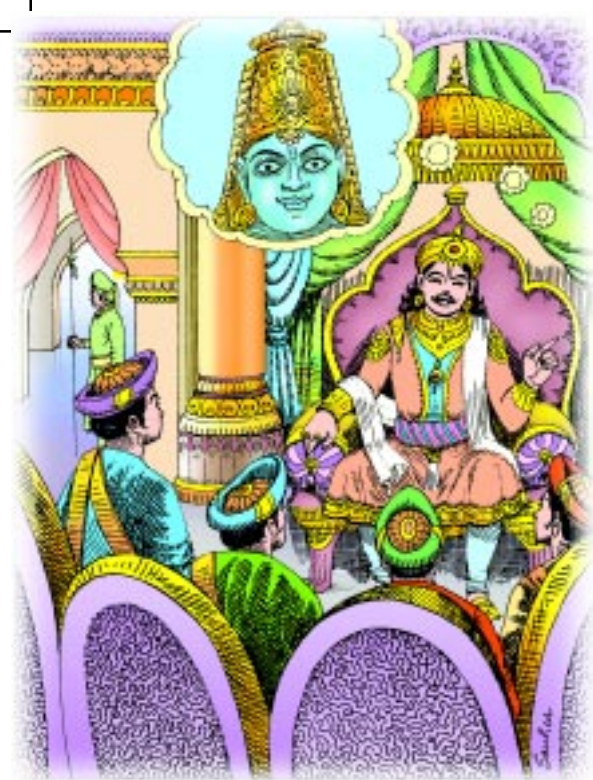
our friend Prasad would like to hear. That would make it special."

The children clapped their hands. Prasad thanked the professor and said, "Sir, I read in a newspaper today that a grand Car Festival will take place in the last week of this month at Puri. The report said it is a unique annual event, attracting tens of thousands of people, and it has been going on for hundreds of years. Even the deities riding the chariots are an unusual trinity. Is there any legend to explain this festival?"

"There is, and an absorbing one at that," said the professor, all smiles.

"Come on, Grandpa, please tell us the story!" prompted Chameli.

The professor finished drinking his cup of tea and began:



The legend takes us back to a remote past. There was once a mighty king named Indradyumna who was a devotee of Krishna. He felt a great urge to build a temple to be dedicated to his Lord and even began work on it. But time and again a thought disturbed him very much. ‘There are so many temples with so many deities. What’s the use of adding another, unless I can enshrine an idol that is very special?’

One night he woke up with a start. He had just dreamt that somewhere, not very far from Puri, lay hidden a mysterious object that bore the living presence of the Lord. If he can find that and place it inside an idol, it would naturally become very special.

As soon as it was morning, the king summoned a few of his court scholars

and told them what he had dreamt. These scholars were known for their insight and intuition. “Go in different directions and try to locate the great object. I shall wait for your return with endless anxiety and expectation.”

One of his emissaries, a young Brahmin scholar named Vidyapati, set out after a long meditation and walked as his inner inspiration guided him. By and by he entered a forest and lost his way. It was evening. Exhausted, he slipped off a rock and lost his consciousness. Luckily, before any wild beast had seen him, he was found by Lalita, daughter of the tribal chief of the forest, and her friends who had come there to fetch water from a spring. They revived him and led him to the chief’s house.

The chief, Visvvasu, was a sage-like man. Vidyapati’s scholarship and humility impressed him. As he found Vidyapati unwell, he requested him to stay with him for some days. Before long Vidyapati and Lalita were attracted towards each other and they were married with the blessings of Visvvasu.

While staying there, Vidyapati observed that every day, early in the morning, Visvvasu collected a handful of flowers and disappeared into the forest, to return only after an hour or so. Vidyapati asked Lalita about it. Though reluctant, she could not keep the secret hidden from her husband. She informed him that a little away from their home, inside a cave,

there was a mysterious object of worship. Only the eldest son of each generation of Visvvasu's dynasty knew the location of the cave and the way to enter it. It was his duty to offer worship to the sacred object. Visvvasu continued the tradition.

Vidyapati's intuition at once told him that his mission had been half accomplished. He insisted on having a chance to see the object. Lalita pleaded with her father to let her husband have that opportunity. Visvvasu agreed, but on condition that Vidyapati must travel to and fro blindfold.

Next day, early in the morning, Visvvasu guided his son-in-law, now blindfolded, to the cave. Once inside the cave, his blind was removed, and Vidyapati had the thrill of his life. The object kept in a tiny casket radiated a supernatural aura and he felt in it a Divine presence. He knew that this was the object in quest of which he had undertaken his journey into the unknown. Only Providence could have guided him there!

It was the rainy season. A few days later Vidyapati took leave of his wife, promising to return soon. He went straight to the cave, lifted the casket and proceeded to Puri non-stop.

How did he find his way to the cave? Well, while being taken there by Visvvasu, he had carried a palmful of mustard seeds and strewn them all along the way. After a few showers they had sprouted into tender plants.

It was these that had directed him to the cave.

The king was waiting for his trusted emissary's return with trepidation, for he had dreamt that Vidyapati had accomplished his mission. Great was his joy. The city went festive.

But gloom had descended in the forest. In the morning, Visvvasu had found out his loss. He could very well surmise what had happened to the object in the cave. One can also imagine the embarrassment caused to Lalita.

King Indradyumna had yet another significant dream. He dreamt of a huge log floating in the sea and heard a voice directing him to carve the Lord's image out of it and to seal the sacred object fetched by Vidyapati in



the image. Lo and behold, standing on the seashore, the king and his entourage could see the floating log. A boat was dispatched to bring the log ashore. Ropes were tied around the log and the boat tried to pull it towards the shore. Alas, the log would not move! More boats were sent. They tried to push and pull the log from opposite sides. But it stayed put.

The futile exercise continued for the whole day. The frustrated king and his queen were in tears. But, in a vision the king saw Visvvasu losing his consciousness again and again and Lalita lying down stunned, awfully ashamed of her husband's conduct.

The king knew his duty. Along with Vidyapati and his ministers, he proceeded into the forest, met Visvvasu, embraced him and apologized to him. He then explained to that great devotee that it was time the sacred object was known to all so that millions of devotees got a chance to pay their respect to it.

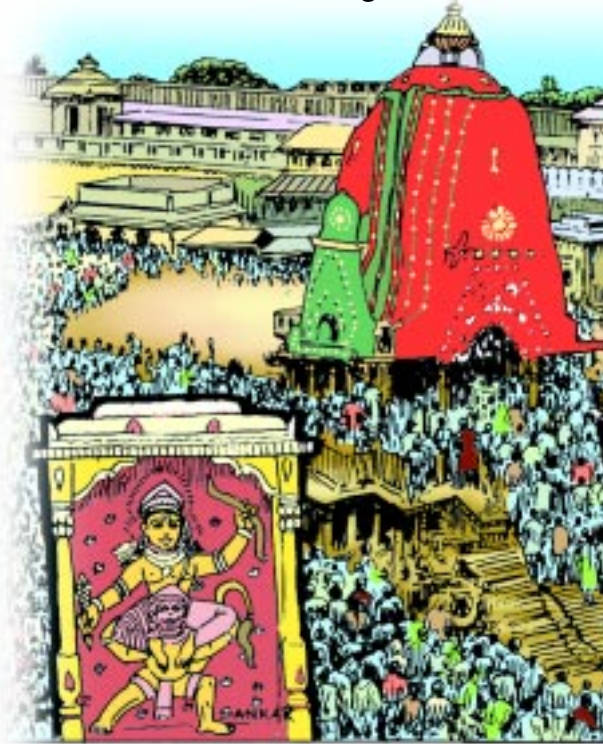
Visvvasu realised the truth of what the king was saying. He accompanied the king to Puri. Both he and the king went into the sea and tried to move the log. Once they had touched it, it easily moved ashore.

But the state of Kalinga, of which Puri was the capital, was known for its highly skilled sculptors who worked on stone. However, nobody was prepared to carve a wooden image. The king was pensive when an old man met him and promised to

carve the image on condition that nobody disturbed him until he had completed his job.

He worked alone inside a large house. Food was supplied to him through a window. Nobody saw him work, though the sound of his implements chiselling the wood could be heard. The queen, Gundicha Devi, would press her ear against the main door and would be happy to hear the sound. But it so happened that for two consecutive days she heard no sound. Curious, she pushed the door open and entered the house. The old man looked back, surprised, and disappeared. He was none other than Visvakarma, the craftsman belonging to heavens, who had taken a human form.

But the image had not been completed. The king, however, decided to enshrine the image as it



was, placing the sacred object inside it.

What was that sacred object? It could be the relics of Krishna. Visvavasu was probably a descendant of Jara Savara, the hunter who had unwittingly shot his arrow at Krishna, causing Him death.

Thus began the worship of the deity, Sri Jagannath. He is a form of Lord Krishna. It is not known at which stage the idols of Balabhadra and Subhadra, the elder brother and younger sister of Krishna were installed beside the main deity.

The annual Car Festival commemorates the journey of Sri Krishna and Balabhadra from Gokul to Mathura.

In perfect silence did the children listen to Professor Devanth.

“Grandpa, what happened to

Lalita?” asked Chameli after a while.

“Of course, she came over to Puri and lived with her husband. Their sons were given the status of the Lord’s priests. Do you remember that Lalita was a tribal princess? That did not stand in the way of her sons becoming important servants of the Lord. That speaks of the quality of the mind of the ancient people. The descendants of the sons of Vidyapati and Lalita are still there – known as the Daitapatis – meaning the guide of the devotees.”

“Thank you, Grandpa, for taking us to a remote past. I’m sure we will enjoy more of the glimpses of the Car Festival on the television in the knowledge of this background,” said Sandip.

-Visvavasu

(To continue)





Tales from other lands (Armenia)

had come to draw water for their homes. The prince asked one of them for a drink and sat down to rest beside the spring. The girl filled a jug and was about to give it to him when another snatched the jug and poured the water on to the ground. This happened four or five times till the prince became quite impatient.

Finally, she was able to give him a drink of water. After drinking deeply, the prince asked her why she had not given the water soon after he had asked for it. "Were you teasing me?" he asked.

"Oh no!" she said. "You were looking so hot and tired, and I was only giving you time to cool off. The icy cold water from the spring would have harmed you otherwise."

The prince was struck by her words and her beauty. He found out that Anait (that was her name) was the daughter of a shepherd called Aran from the village. The prince went away before she could ask him who he was.

However, the prince did not forget her. Far from it. After going home, he told his mother that he would not marry anyone else but Anait. The king and queen were upset, but there was nothing they could do, because Prince Vatchagan was adamant.

So the king and queen sent

Armenia is a small country to the north east of Turkey. The country nestles among the rugged mountains and volcanoes of the Caucasian mountains. It is a beautiful country, and the people are hard working and hardy.

This story is about a prince and a princess who ruled Armenia many years ago. The prince was called Vatchagan and he was the king's only son. He went travelling all over the country, perhaps to learn about his country and the people before he came to the throne. His faithful servant and companion, Nazar, accompanied him wherever he went.

As they travelled, they once came to a village with a lovely spring near a waterfall. The girls from the village

messengers with expensive gifts to Aran the shepherd. When the messengers told Aran why they had come, he did not jump for joy. Instead, he went very quiet and sat tracing the fine design on the beautiful carpet that Anait had woven.

The messengers were puzzled. "Why, aren't you happy? After all, the prince of the land wants the hand of your daughter," they asked.

"Honoured guests, I've no power to decide who my daughter will wed. If she agrees, I've no objection," he said.

At that moment, Anait came in with a tray of fruits for the guests. After serving them, she sat down at her loom to weave one of the beautiful carpets for which she was famous. The messengers were amazed at the dexterous way she plied the shuttle. They also came to know that she was an unusual young woman for, not only did she know how to read and write, she had also taught many in the village to do so.

"Anait," said Nazar, who was one of the messengers, "the king's son saw you at the spring the other day and liked you. He wants to marry you. Come away with us. You can teach all the city dwellers to read and write."

"Ah, so the hunter at the spring was Prince Vatchagan. Before I agree to his proposal, could I ask a question? Does he know a trade?"

"A trade?" repeated Nazar in surprise. "He's the king's son and will one day be king himself. Why then does he need a trade?"

"You never know how the wheel of fortune will turn. A master might become a servant. Everyone should know a trade. Take these presents back to your prince and tell him that I like him a lot, but I would not marry anyone who knows no trade."

So Nazar and the other messengers went back, not knowing what to make of the young woman.

Prince Vatchagan, however, had no doubts. "I'll marry only this young woman," he declared. "And so a trade I will learn."

The king called together all his advisers, and they decided that learning to weave gold cloth was a good trade for a prince.



The prince set about learning his trade with great determination, and by the end of the year he had become an expert at weaving cloth of gold. He decided to send a gift to Anait. This time it was an exquisite piece of gold cloth he had woven himself. Anait now agreed to marry him. Prince Vatchagan was over the mountains with happiness. The wedding celebrations lasted a whole week.

Anait and the prince lived happily. The people of Armenia loved their good and wise princess. In course of time, the old king and queen died, and Prince Vatchagan and Anait became the King and Queen of Armenia.

Soon after this, Vatchagan's friend and companion, Nazar, suddenly disappeared. They searched everywhere for him, but no one knew what had happened to him. Vatchagan was very sad, but he had to rule the kingdom and soon became immersed in his duties.

One day Anait told her husband: "Everyone says everything is well

with our kingdom, but once a while something bad does happen. For instance, the disappearance of Nazar. Maybe, like the kings of olden days, you must go round the kingdom in disguise and find out how things actually are."

"Yes," agreed King Vatchagan. "What you say is right. I used to know more of what was happening when I was a prince, because I used to go everywhere then. But if I were to go away, who will rule the kingdom?"

Anait said, "I will, and I shall rule it in such a way no one will know that you are away."

The king then disguised himself as a merchant and set off on a tour of the kingdom. Before he left, he told Anait, "If I'm not back in a month's time, you take it that I am dead or something terrible has happened to me."

Anait ruled the kingdom wisely and well. No one knew that the king was not in the palace. Thirty days passed and the king did not come back. When another ten days passed without a word from him, Anait got quite worried and did not know what to do. She had all kinds of bad dreams at night and saw terrible omens during the day.

Every minute she was awake, she wondered what would have happened to her husband. She could not share her worry with anyone else and had to bear it all alone. **- To conclude**

Chandamama



For a favour

The king was perturbed about the rising number of complaints of corruption in the kingdom. For anything and everything a bribe was being demanded. He announced that anybody asking for and taking bribe would be summarily punished. His nose would be chopped off, and nothing less. He appointed an official to award the punishment.

One evening, as the king was taking a stroll on the terrace of his palace, he saw on the street below two persons engaged in animated conversation. One was the official engaged to chop off noses and the other was the person found guilty that very morning. He sent for them and asked the official why he had not carried out his duty.

Before he could reply, the other man said: “Your majesty, he told me that he has two knives, one sharp and the other blunt. If I gave him two rupees, he said he would use the sharp knife to chop off my nose, and in one stroke!”





A merchant had two sons. The elder boy was very clever and resourceful, while the younger one was a simpleton. The merchant feared that he might not live long; and he did not want the younger boy to be cheated when it came to sharing his wealth. So, he put all his wealth into two sacks and called his sons. “These two sacks contain all my wealth. I’ve divided it equally between you two. Once I am dead and gone, you may take one sack each, and make a living.”

Unfortunately, the merchant died the very next day. That night, the elder son stealthily opened the two sacks and examined their contents. In one, there were silver coins on top and some clay balls at the bottom. In the other sack, the clay balls were at the top while the bottom had silver coins. He collected all the silver coins into one sack and pushed all the clay balls into the other.

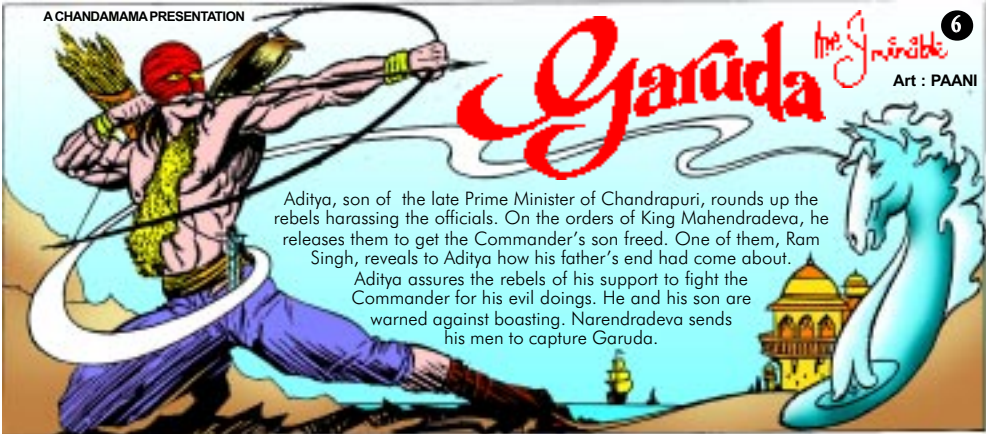
In the morning, he called his brother and said: “You take that sack, and I shall take this one.” Of course, he had taken care to identify the sack with the silver coins, which he now took with him.

The younger brother opened the sack and saw the clay balls. He began breaking them open. Each ball yielded a gold coin.

Garuda the Invisible

6

Art : PAANI



Aditya, son of the late Prime Minister of Chandrapuri, rounds up the rebels harassing the officials. On the orders of King Mahendradeva, he releases them to get the Commander's son freed. One of them, Ram Singh, reveals to Aditya how his father's end had come about.

Aditya assures the rebels of his support to fight the Commander for his evil doings. He and his son are warned against boasting. Narendradeva sends his men to capture Garuda.

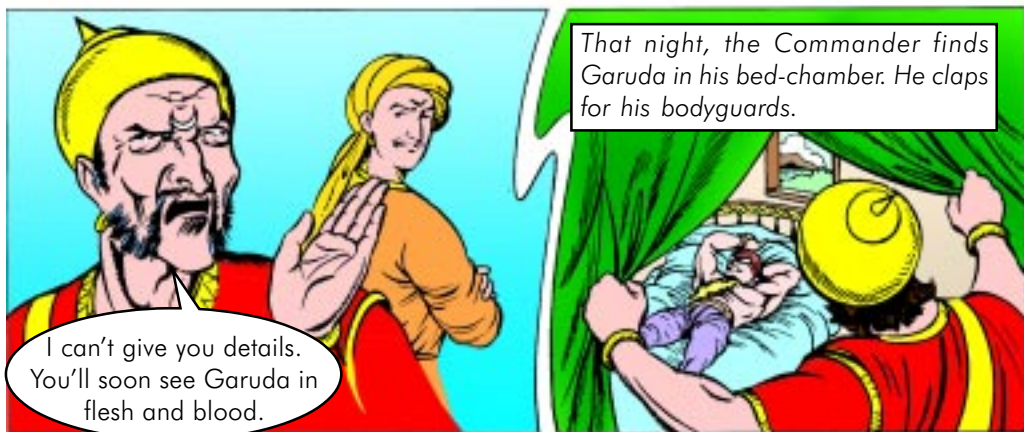
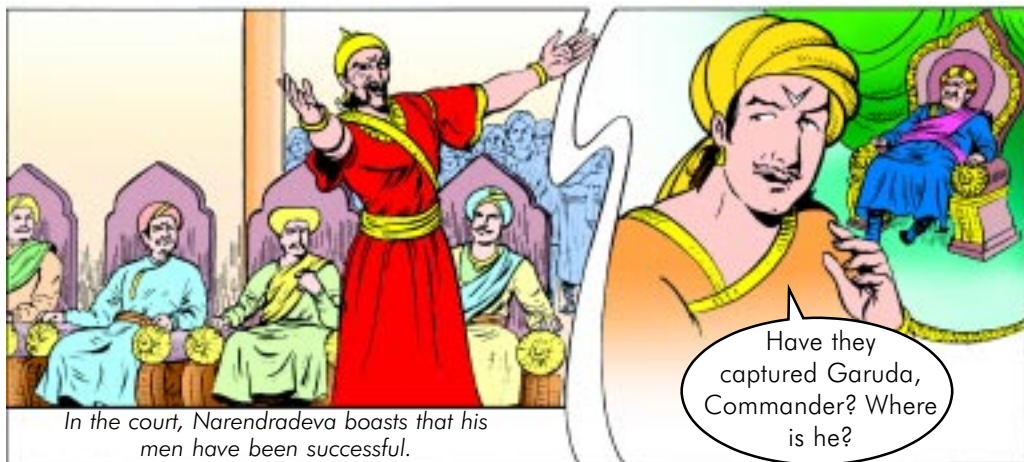
Each of the eight chiefs is given an area to comb for Garuda...

...and they go in eight different directions.

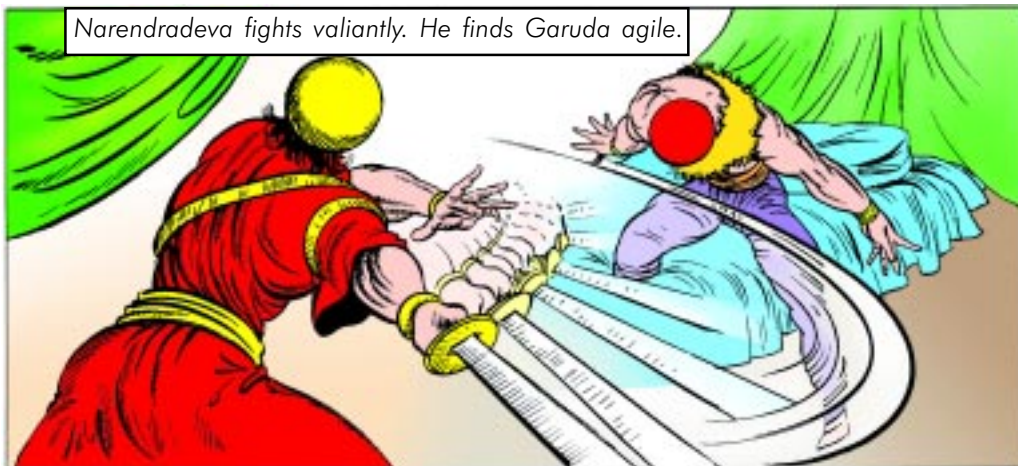


Garuda misleads each group, engaging them in mock battles, with eight of his men all dressed like Garuda.





Narendradeva fights valiantly. He finds Garuda agile.



Garuda is here, there, and everywhere.

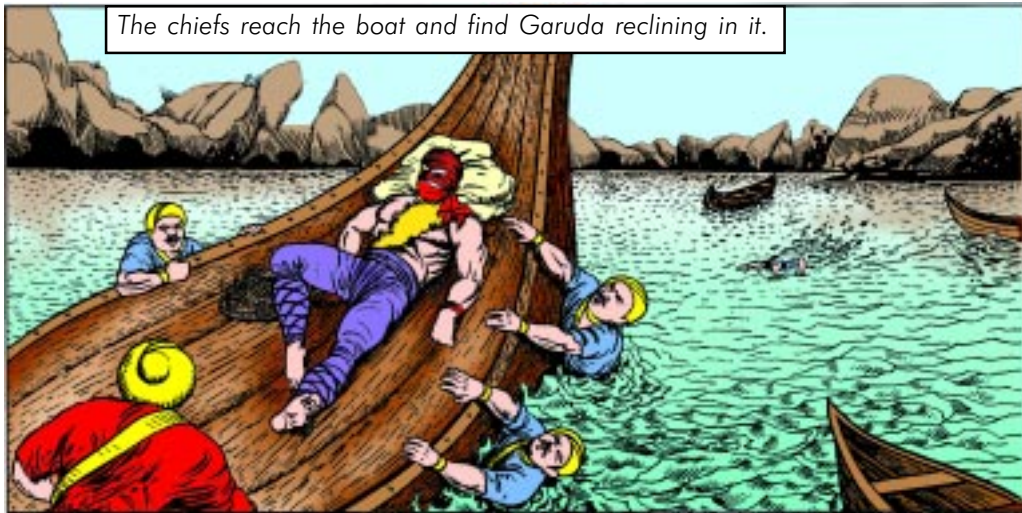


Narendradeva is easily trounced.

Meanwhile, on hearing that Garuda has been seen in a boat, all the eight chiefs rush to the lake.



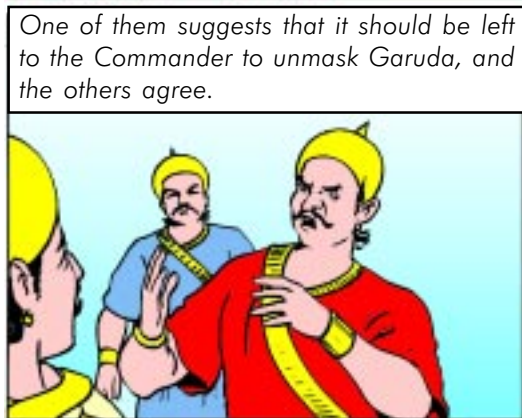
The chiefs reach the boat and find Garuda reclining in it.



They are greatly relieved as they find Garuda unconscious.



One of them suggests that it should be left to the Commander to unmask Garuda, and the others agree.



Let him be chained and taken to the court.



To continue

Punishment to hunger

Jagveera was ruling over the kingdom of Jayapuri. One day, the royal treasury was plundered. However, the robber Pannalal was soon apprehended along with the looted money. The soldiers took him to the court and stood him before the king.

“So, you’ve been caught red-handed, eh?” the king thundered. “I don’t need any other evidence. But before I punish you, do you have anything to say in your defence?”

Pannalal bowed low and pleaded: “Your majesty, it was hunger that drove me to commit this crime. If you will punish me despite my confession, I would request you to punish the actual culprit—hunger.”

Pannalal was clever in thinking that as hunger could not be punished, he too would escape punishment.

But Jagveera saw through his game. “You will be imprisoned for a year,” he said, “and Hunger, which provoked you to plunder the royal treasury, will starve for a week. You and Hunger will undergo the punishment together.”



Mukesh keeps a goat

Our readers must have been fascinated by the personal experiences of the well-known writer Ruskin Bond, some of which have appeared in these pages under the feature “Many Horizons”. This month we publish one of his stories for children that had appeared a few years ago in Junior Quest, one of our sister publications. -Editor

Mukesh's favourite pet was a little black goat, which followed him home from the mustard fields one day. Every year, before the monsoon rains came, the little Song River outside Dehra was just a narrow stream. Mukesh liked wading across and then wandering through the fields and tea gardens, watching the men moving about among the yellow

mustard and the women, in their bright red

saris, plucking tea leaves.

He had been sitting on the banks of a small irrigation canal, gazing at a couple of herons fishing in the muddy water, when he felt something bump his elbow. Looking around he found, by his side, a little goat, jet black and soft as velvet, with lovely, grey eyes. Neither her mother nor her owner was around.

She continued to nudge Mukesh, so he looked into his pockets for nourishment and, finding the remnants of a *samosa*, held it out to her. She ate it with relish, then lay down beside him and began nibbling at the grass.

A little later, when Mukesh got up to leave, the goat rose, too. And when he started walking home, she followed unsteadily, her thin legs taking her this way and that.

“Go home!” said Mukesh, as she danced around him. But it was clear that she had forgotten the way home because she followed him to the riverbed. It was obvious that her trembling legs would not stand up to

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the current, so he took her in his arms and carried her across the stream. When he set her down, she remained by his side, rubbing herself against his legs.

Mukesh set out for home at a brisk pace, feeling sure that he would soon leave the goat behind. But her legs were stronger than he had supposed. She came hopping along, right up to the gate of his house.

There was nothing he could do but carry her in and show her to his parents. "She's my friend," he announced.

"Not another pet!" said his mother when she saw the goat on the verandah, lapping up a saucer of milk. "I've told you again and again that I will not have any animals in or around the house!"

It was easy to understand his mother's objections. Only a few weeks ago, Mukesh had started his own zoo in the back garden. As a result, their neighbour's parrot, borrowed and put on display, had escaped; the washerman's donkey had gone missing for two days, and Mukesh's mother had found her kitchen full of fleeing lizards.

"And besides," she said, "your dog won't be happy with a goat in the house."

But Mukesh's black dog (with

yellow eyes) merely looked up from the bone he was gnawing at the other end of the verandah, and paid no attention to the newcomer. There would be no competition from a grass-eater who could not dig for bones.

"Goat's milk is good for your health," said Mukesh. "I read about it somewhere. That's why I brought it home. You haven't been looking well this week, mother."

The prospect of an eventual supply of free milk tilted the decision in favour of keeping the goat, even though they knew it would be some time before it would provide any.

There was something fairylike about the little goat and Mukesh named her Pari, meaning fairy. She skipped about very daintily, and her feet seemed equipped with springs when she leaped around the small lawn. To make the name even more fitting, Mukesh tied a little bell around her neck so that he would always know by its fairy tinkling where she was.

She loved an early morning walk and was, in many ways, as good or even a better companion than his dog: she did not wander off on her own or get into quarrels with cows, cats, stray dogs or porcupines. The only things she chased were butterflies and she





would tumble into ditches and slither down slopes in her eagerness to follow them.

But unlike the fairies, who never grow up, Mukesh's Pari had to grow up and soon she developed a neat little pair of horns. Her appetite began to increase, too. She loved the leaves and flowers of the sweet pea, the nasturtium, and the geranium. They were also Mukesh's father's favourite garden flowers, and every year his sweet peas won prizes at the annual Flower Show.

One morning, he found most of his sweet peas destroyed. Hastily Mukesh blamed a cow, suggesting that it had got into the garden during the night. His father made no comment, but gave him a look that suggested he knew just who the culprit was; and it was obvious that he bitterly regretted having allowed Mukesh to keep the goat. By the time

the Flower Show came around, he had only zinnias left—apparently, the goat disliked zinnias—and they took the Third Prize.

Mukesh took care to keep the goat well out of his father's sight.

Of course, trouble, just like unseasonal rain, came when Mukesh was least expecting it.

Pari, having discovered the various uses to which she could put her horns, began using them at almost every opportunity. A part-time gardener, who had never been known to grumble, came to Mukesh's mother to complain that he had been bending over the sweet-pea bed, putting it right again, when the goat had come up quietly and butted him from behind. He refused to work in the garden till Pari was tied up.

"And by the way," said Mukesh's mother, after she had been calmed down, "when are we going to have that milk we were promised?"

It wasn't long before the postman, the fruit-seller, and the newspaper boy all had complaints to make. They dared not turn their back on the playful, young goat.

Events reached a climax during the visit of one of Mukesh's aunts. Chachi (father's sister) was in the habit of bending over flowerpots and holding brief conversations with the flowers. She

said it helped them grow faster.

She was bending over a pot, talking to a geranium, when the goat, suspecting that Chachi was eating the leaves, decided to butt this intruder out of the way of her favourite snack.

Chachi did not take kindly to being kicked off the verandah; she insisted that she had been badly bruised, though she refused all offers of first-aid from Mukesh.

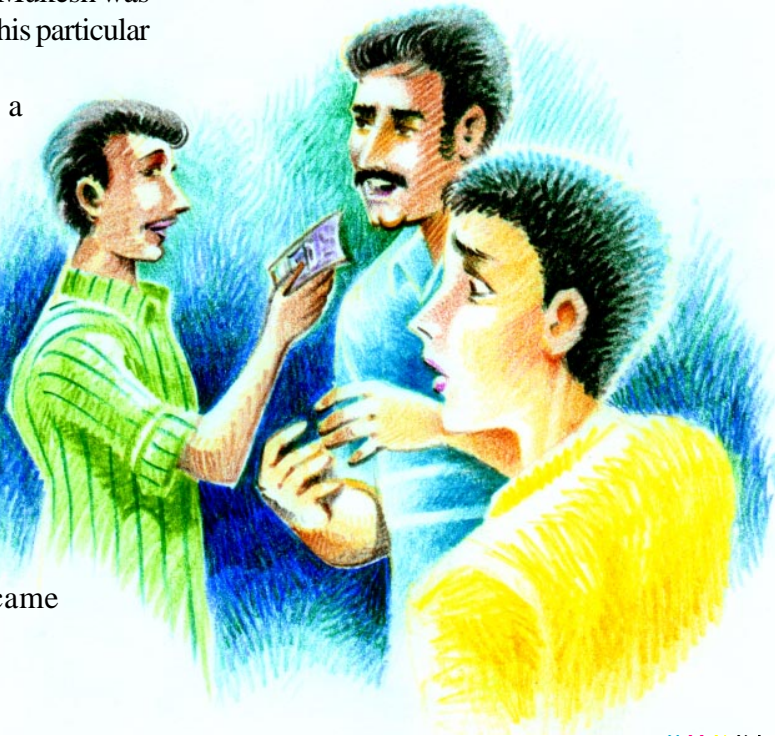
It was the end of the goat's comfortable stay with the family. Mukesh's father asked Nathu, the newspaper boy, to take her straight to the bazaar and sell her, at any price, to the first customer that came along.

Mukesh stood at the gate and watched his Pari being led away. She kept looking back and bleating, probably wondering why Mukesh was not accompanying her on this particular walk.

Nathu gave Mukesh a smile and wink as if to suggest that all would be well. Nathu had worked as a cleaner at a local coope-rative bank before it was wound up; now he sold news-papers; but his 'b a n k i n g experience', as he put it, made him a good judge of a promising investment. When he came

back from the bazaar, he announced that the goat had been sold and handed to Mukesh's father a fifty-rupee note. But later, when he was alone with Mukesh, he told him that he had bought the goat himself, and that Mukesh could come and see her from time to time, in her new home behind the bazaar.

Mukesh did visit her sometimes. And, in due course, he found her with a little kid. Pari had also become a good provider of milk and Nathu and his small brothers and sisters were great milk-drinkers. She was on good terms with everyone in the family and only butted strangers who bowed too low when entering or leaving by the small courtyard door.



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The past that was

Anand washed his face and hands; just as he sat down to eat his lunch, he heard a cry outside: “Would you please spare some food for me? I’m hungry!” It was a mendicant. Anand called him inside, made him sit down, and asked his wife to serve him food.

The mendicant looked at Anand and remarked: “In your previous birth, you were King Veerasimha’s minister.” At that moment, Anand’s wife came in to serve food. The mendicant looked at her and said: “You were the queen of Veerasimha.”

Anand was curious. He had not expected a mendicant to possess such powers to read one’s past. “So, I was a minister, and my wife was a queen in our previous birth, did you say? It’s something great to hear. But, pray tell us, what happened to King Veerasimha himself? What did he become?”

“Ah! You don’t know!” said the mendicant, coolly. “I was King Veerasimha in my previous birth!”

Anand now realised what kind of powers the mendicant possessed. He picked up a bamboo staff. On seeing him with the stick, the mendicant hurriedly got up and made good his escape. “Please don’t beat me!” he cried out to Anand, who was following him close behind.



THE RESTLESS COFFINS

On the remote island of Barbados, in the West Indies, nestles the little Christ Church, overlooking the bay at Oistins. In its graveyard there is an underground vault in which there occurred a very eerie phenomenon more than 150 years ago—a phenomenon which repeated itself with “chilling regularity” for almost a decade and has remained unexplained so far.

In 1812, several men struggled to remove a marble slab of great weight guarding the tomb’s entrance. A funeral was being held for the Chase family, to whom the vault was supposed to have belonged, and hence its name, the Chase Vault. As the coffin was being carried down the steps, an unusual scene greeted the mourners. The two coffins that were there in a tomb already had shifted from their respective places. One was found resting, head downward, in a

far corner and the other had been flung aside against a wall. The bewildered witnesses first restored the coffins to their original positions, and then placed the new one and securely closed the vault.

Four years passed by. The underground vault was required to be opened again for another funeral. Believe it or not, this time, too, the coffins had moved about and lay scattered in a topsy-turvy way. Amazed, the mourners could do little, but to return the coffins to their rightful positions. The doorway to the vault was then firmly blocked with the heavy slab.

How could the coffins move about and even stand up all by themselves? The vault, measuring 12 feet by 6 feet, built of large cemented blocks of coral, did not contain anything valuable to tempt any burglar. Whereas, the huge blue marble slab, guarding the only entrance, had always been found intact with its seal unbroken! Even beneath the vault, there was rock-hard limestone,





practically impossible for a tunnel to be dug through. Finally, the coffins made of lead, weighing nearly 700 to 800 pounds, would have required at least a dozen people to shift them around. It looked highly improbable that a group of so many men could have broken into the vault and left without leaving behind any trace. Yet, the coffins had moved! And whoever had moved them never cared to break them open.

Could it then be the handiwork of some supernatural forces? Spirits or ghosts?

A month-and-a-half after the last burial, the vault was opened again for transferring a coffin from its temporary resting place to the vault. Lo and

behold, there had been fresh disturbances! The four coffins resting there had tumbled over from their respective places and lay scattered all over once again. Who could have done it? The coffins were all put back to their original positions. The vault remained unopened for the next three years.

Meanwhile, the news of the weird happenings in the Chase Vault had spread far and wide and throughout the West Indies. It was not before long that thousands of curious visitors flocked to the graveyard of the Christ Church, to see at first hand the “creeping coffins of Barbados”, as they had come to be called.

It seems the mystery by then had become a major national issue. Lord Combermere, the Governor of Barbados, decided to personally inspect the vault. So, in July 1819, he attended a funeral in the Christ Church, along with a team of experts. Besides them, there were also other government officials and a large crowd of curious onlookers.

Alas, all efforts to open the vault failed. It seemed something very heavy was leaning against the massive marble slab from inside. Finally, with the help of more men, the heavy marble stone was removed as hundreds of spectators looked on with bated breath. A large coffin was standing upright blocking the

doorway! The other coffins were in total disarray. The Governor's men carried out a thorough investigation and found no evidence to show that the coffins had been tampered with or anyone had entered the vault.

Though baffled, Lord Combermere did not give up. The coffins were restored to their original places and their positions carefully marked. The entire floor of the vault was then covered with fine, white sand so that no creature could step on it without leaving footprints. It was ensured that there was no hidden passage into the vault. Finally, the vault's only entrance was securely blocked with the great marble slab. The Governor put his official seal on the cement and on the lock and even asked his aides to put their personal marks.

Nine months later, in April 1820, the Governor and his team returned to the Chase Vault. The seals were as fresh and sharp as on the day they had been put. The lock and the door looked untouched.

But inside? The scene was one of chaos! A coffin was found standing up against a wall of the vault tossed there as if it was a mere matchstick. Another seemed to have been sent flying to the far end of the vault with such force that it had chipped off a part of the tough coral wall. Each of

the other coffins had also moved away from their original positions. No marks were found in the sand. A careful inspection of the vault showed that there was no possibility of anyone entering it without first breaking the seal on the doorway.

Then, who would have moved the coffins? What bizarre power had tossed these massive weights all around as if they were mere playthings?



Lord Combermere could tolerate it no longer. He ordered that all coffins be at once taken away and buried in some peaceful resting places elsewhere in the churchyard. The mysterious Chase Vault was never sealed again. It remains open and empty to this day, reminding the passers-by of the eerie and chilling phenomenon that happened there years ago!

Midnight Fiesta

In a dark and gloomy corner of a village, just next to a forest, lived Ganga all alone. She did not mind being alone. Nor was she afraid of living near a forest. She would work here and there in the village now and then, and somehow always had enough to eat. And she was contented with that. Not many in the village knew her well, not even her neighbour, the curious Dhanraj.

One night,
when the clock
struck the
midnight

hour with a loud chime, the cocks in the neighbouring farms crowed loudly. Ganga thought it was already dawn. She woke up, wondering why it was still dark. Still groggy and sleepy, she groped her way to the verandah and lit up her stove of firewood. She clanged her frying pan on to it and poured in some oil. With eyes half-closed, she cut up vegetables, turned them into the oil, added salt and spices, and started frying them! A yummy aroma of spicy vegetables wafted all around!

Soon there came up an old bent man, his head and body cloaked in a dark shawl ballooning in the breeze. He sat down beside her. "Hmm..... what divine smell! You seem to be a gifted cook," he exclaimed.

"Would you like to taste the vegetables?" offered Ganga.

The old man took a piece of fried potato and nibbled at it. "Hmmm!" he said. "Do you mind if I call my friends?"

Ganga said there was enough for all of them. Soon four more old men, similarly dressed, reached there. All of them ate a plate each of the vegetables along with hot *pooris*, and thoroughly enjoyed the food. Before

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they left, the first old man said, “Would you mind if we came here every night at this time for food?” Then each of them gave her a gold coin and left.

Ganga saw no harm in this and agreed to cook for them every night.

Months passed, and Ganga soon made a neat pile of gold coins. One summer night, her neighbour Dhanraj woke up feeling thirsty, and as he gulped down water from a jug, he peeped out of the window. His attention was arrested. He saw Ganga cooking and five strangers enjoying her meal. When he also saw them giving gold coins, his eyes nearly popped out. He planned to take over Ganga’s business by playing a trick on her.

Next morning, he approached Ganga and told her: “What on earth are you doing? Inviting your own doom, eh?”

Ganga looked bewildered. Dhanraj continued: “Your eyes clearly show that the vampires have cast an evil spell on you. After all, you meet them every night, don’t you?”

“Some poor, hungry men come here night after night and I cook for them. But this talk about vampires...I don’t understand,” replied Ganga.

“You don’t believe me, do you? Those men who come to your house every night are actually vampires. Wait for a few days. They’ll kill you and drink your blood, as they did to

the woman who lived here before you came,” warned Dhanraj.

Ganga was horrified. “O God! What will I do now?” she whimpered.

“Leave the village before the vampires kill you!” advised Dhanraj.

Ganga said: “Yes, I’ll do as you say.” That very day she packed all her belongings and fled the town.

Dhanraj hurried home to his wife. “Listen, good luck awaits us. All you have to do is, sit in the verandah of



that deserted house and fry some vegetables every midnight. We’ll mint money, I tell you.”

But his wife was not amused. “We’ve enough money. If you want more, why don’t *you* sit and fry vegetables?”

That night, greedy Dhanraj went to the house with a stove and sat on the verandah. When it was midnight, a hoarse voice from behind startled him. “Where’s the woman who used to sit here and cook delicious food?”

"I don't know where she has gone! But don't worry. I'll make wonderful things for you to eat," said Dhanraj. The five old men sat down reluctantly. The night was still and dead. Somewhere the baying of wild dogs was heard.

Dhanraj handed around plates with *rotis* and fried vegetables. The men

nibbled at some vegetables doubtfully. "Pah!" growled one. "Tchee!" spat out another. "This is too salty!"

And one of them suddenly said: "You good for nothing fellow! What you've cooked can be eaten only by hogs!"

"Tomorrow we want meat. And it should be well-cooked!" said another in a threatening voice. They prepared to leave.

Dhanraj waited for his share of gold coins. But the men showed no sign of giving him any. He lost his cool and yelled: "How dare you leave without paying me? Give me my dues."

"Your dues?" shrieked all of them together.

Dhanraj looked up. The shawls hooding the heads of the four men billowed away into the darkness of the night. A bat swooped down on Dhanraj and circled his head before fluttering away. A sudden fear seized the man. He looked at the five figures. Fearful fire flashed from their eyes. Long tongues darted out and sharp teeth suddenly curled out of the cavernous mouths of the five vampires.

Dhanraj realised that though he thought he had lied to Ganga when he spoke of vampires, these five were really vampires. And there was no escape for him.



Know Your India

QUIZ

To mark World Environment Day on June 5, this month's quiz relates to nature, geography, and environment vis-a-vis India. Find out how much upto date you are with information.

1. Which is India's longest river?
2. Which river was once known as the Vitasta?
3. Godwin Austen is the name of the highest mountain in India. Mountaineers call it by another name. What is it?
4. What is the name of India's second highest peak?
5. According to the National Forest Policy, there must be a minimum percentage of area under forests in the total land area. What is the minimum?
6. Which state has the least forest area?
7. When was Project Tiger launched?
8. Where is Nalsarovar? What can you see there?
9. When was coal mining started in India? Where?
10. What is India's rank in coal production in the world?
11. India has the world's largest reserves of which mineral?
12. Where should one go to visit the National Museum of Natural History?
13. In which state are the Aravalli range of mountains?
14. On which river is the Hirakud project built?
15. It was recently reported that the gold mines of Kolar, in Mysore, are to be closed down. When was mining first started there?

(Answers next month)

Answers to May Quiz

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. C.F. Andrews. | English of Kalidas's |
| 2. Dr. Annie Besant. She was the President of the Theosophical Society | <i>Shakuntala</i> . |
| 3. Sir William Jones; he prepared the first ever translation in | 4. La Martiniere. |
| | 5. Madelaine Slade took the name of Mira Behn. |
| | 6. Mother Teresa. |

13. ABDUCTION OF SITA

Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana set off for the forest dressed in rough clothes, with their hair knotted up like those of *rishis*.

When Dasaratha came out of the deep faint he had fallen into, he was told that Rama had already left for the forest to keep his father's word. He could not bear the pain and grief over the news and died with Rama's name on his lips.

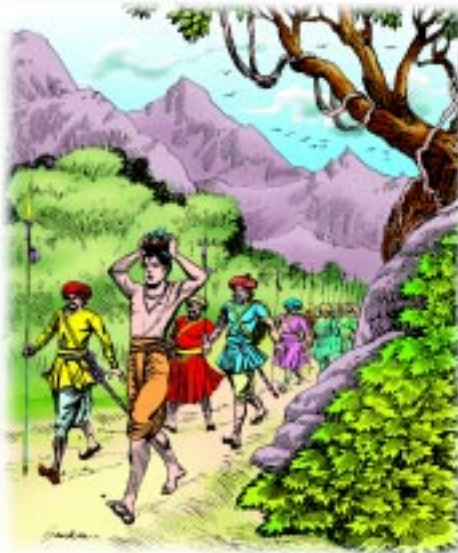
While these dramatic events were taking place in Ayodhya, Bharata was away in Nandigram with Shatrughna on a visit to his maternal grandparents. He came back to find Ayodhya plunged in mourning for the death of its king and the loss of its crown prince. Bharata cremated his father with a heavy heart. He was furious with his mother for breaking up the idyllic life the four brothers had enjoyed. He then decided that to undo the terrible

harm done by his mother, he should meet Rama and persuade him to return to Ayodhya. So, he set off with white umbrellas (the mark of royalty), the entire family, and many citizens of Ayodhya to request Rama to take his rightful place on the throne.

Bharata's pleas or the tears of the citizens of Ayodhya did not move Ramachandra. He told Bharata: "We both must ensure that our father's word is kept and his promise carried out. As my younger brother, do as I say. Ascend the throne of Ayodhya and rule it well."

Bharata was not willing to do that. "If you won't come back to Ayodhya, I can't force you, but I won't rule as king. I shall look after the kingdom on your behalf."

Bharata then picked up Rama's sandals and declared: "These sandals of yours shall sit on the throne till you come back to Ayodhya to take your rightful



place.” Then carrying the sandals on his head, Bharata went back to Ayodhya to carry out his word.

After Bharata had gone, Rama went deeper into the forest. At that time, Dandakaranya was dominated by two rakshasas called Khara and Dushan. While they were wandering in the forest, they saw Rama entering the forest with his wife and brother. The rakshasas decided to attack these humans who had trespassed into their territory. When they were surrounded, Rama and Lakshmana set off a volley of arrows that scattered the rakshasas. Khara and Dushan were killed by Rama.

Those who escaped went to Shoorpanakha, their leader. She was the sister of rakshasa Ravana. He ruled over Lanka and he had made Shoorpanakha the chief of the forests to the south of the Vindhyas.

They told Shoorpanakha: “Two wicked humans have entered our forest. They seem to be bent on destroying all the rakshasas. They have killed your assistants Khara and Dushan and are now settling down there to wage a war on the rest of us.”

Shoorpanakha was incensed at the report and set off to destroy the two men who had dared enter the forest.

In the meantime, Rama, Sita and Lakshmana had reached a beautiful place which had five huge banyan trees; it was called Panchavati. It was on the banks of the Godavari and

Chandamama



looked a peaceful and delightful place. They built a lovely little cottage and thought they would pass the years of exile in the serene surroundings.

Soon afterwards, Shoorpanakha turned up at the cottage. She was attracted by the handsome Rama and tried to lure him away from the cottage. But he would have none of it. She then tried to attract Lakshmana and failed. Then, when she tried to attack Sita, Lakshmana lost his temper and cut off her ears and nose. Screaming and yelling, Shoorpanakha reached Lanka and complained to her brother about the way the mortals Rama and Lakshmana had treated her. She also praised Sita’s beauty to kindle Ravana’s interest.

He was very keen to see this human beauty. He also wanted to teach a lesson to the mortals who had dared

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insult his sister. So he sent his uncle Maricha, who was capable of assuming any form, as a golden deer to the woods around Panchavati. The sight of the golden deer charmed Sita. She wanted it for a pet. Rama asked Lakshmana to protect Sita while he went after the deer. After a while, Sita got restless when they heard what sounded like Rama's voice. "Ah, Sita! Ah, Lakshmana!" cried the voice.

Sita was now certain that something terrible had happened to Rama. She insisted that Lakshmana should go to the help of his brother. When Lakshmana protested, Sita got quite annoyed and accused him of not caring for Rama. Immediately Lakshmana got up. He drew three lines in front of the hut with his arrow and told Sita that within the three lines

she would still have his protection, but she would be defenceless if she were to cross the lines.

Once Sita was left alone, Ravana saw his chance and in the guise of a rishi begging for food, he fooled her into crossing the Lakshmana *rekha*. He quickly threw her over his shoulder and forcibly carried her away in his chariot. When the brothers came back and found Sita missing, Rama was overcome by grief and could barely contain himself. He and Lakshmana then set off to look for her.

After a while they came upon Jatayu the Eagle King, a great friend of their father Dasaratha, with his wings cut and bleeding to death. Jatayu said: "Rama, I tried to prevent wicked Ravana from carrying away Sita, but that demon was too strong for me. He left me like this and carried her to the south towards Lanka." Jatayu soon breathed his last.

With great sorrow, Rama cremated Jatayu and proceeded towards the south. At that time a monster called Kabandha caught them in his long tentacle-like hands. But Rama and Lakshmana freed themselves by cutting them off with a sword. This monster was actually a Gundharva who had been cursed to live on earth like a monster. Rama's sword freed him from the curse. Before ascending to heaven, he told Rama that if he made friends

with the monkey tribes, he would be successful in his quest.

Sugriva, who lived in the Rishyamooka mountain with his tribe of monkeys, sent Hanuman to meet Rama. Hanuman was the son of Vayu, the god of Wind and he was also called Maruti. When he was young, Hanuman had caught the rising sun taking it for a ripe fruit. Lord Indra got angry and sent a thunderbolt hurtling at him. Maruti fainted and Vayu the Wind God went absolutely still from grief. Then the gods blessed Hanuman with eternal life.

At that time Brahma gave Hanuman a precious pair of gold earrings and said: "Whoever knows the value of these earrings and praises them specially will be Vishnu's *avatar*. Recognise him and serve him faithfully in your life on Earth."

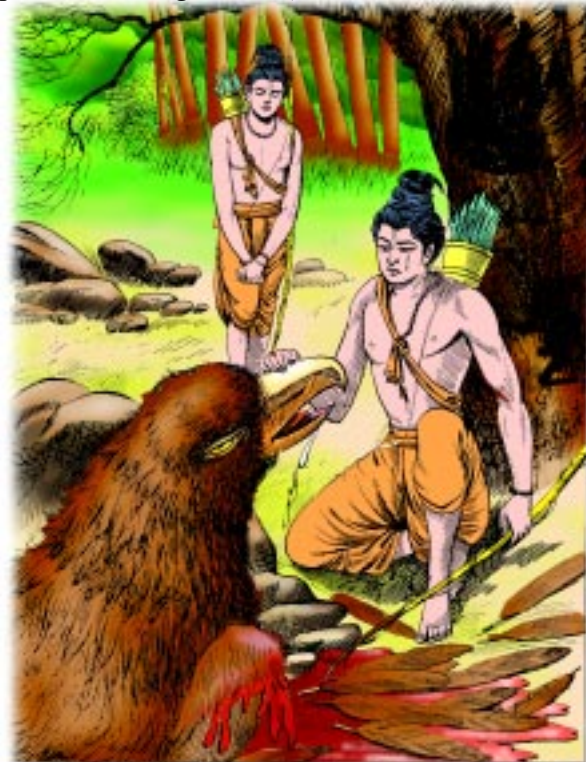
Sugriva, the leader of the monkeys, asked Hanuman to go to Rama in the form of a brahmachari. As soon as Rama saw Hanuman, he told Lakshmana: "Can you see that handsome person? Look at his earrings. They are so incomparably bright and beautiful."

At once Hanuman remembered what Brahma had told him and realised that Rama was Vishnu's incarnation.

Sugriva and Rama soon became allies and friends. Rama promised to help Sugriva with his problems. Sugriva's brother Bali was the King

of Kishkinta. He got upset with Sugriva over a misunderstanding and threatened to kill him. Sugriva, unable to handle him, ran away from the kingdom and took refuge in the Rishyamooka mountain. Bali now imprisoned Sugriva's wife.

Rama promised Sugriva help in overcoming his brother. Fighting or killing Bali was, however, not such a simple matter. He had a boon that he would acquire half the power of whoever faced him in battle. Therefore, Rama had to find a way of overcoming Bali without having to face him. One day, when Sugriva and Bali were engaged in a battle, Rama shot an arrow at Bali from behind a tree and killed him and thus kept his promise to Sugriva. **(To continue)**





Choice of words

The people of Gaganvihar led a peaceful and contented life under the rule of Gajendravarma. He was holding court one day, when in walked Chandanprakash who traded in perfumes. On a nod from the king, he spoke thus: “Your majesty, I’m one among the many who have benefited by your benevolent rule. My business has thrived. The other day, I brought a very superior perfume from the island of Java. Before I put it out for sale, I wish to present a bottle of the perfume to you. Please accept it and wish my venture success.”

The king took the bottle from Chandanprakash, opened it, and smelt a little drop on his palm. “Exquisite!” the king exclaimed. “I’ve no doubt, this scent will soon be popular.” He then called one of the attendants and

asked him to smear the dress of everyone in the court with a drop of the perfume. Soon a sweet-smelling scent wafted from all the four corners of the hall.

The poet laureate Anandbharati now rose in his seat and said: “The scent that everybody can smell now has to be attributed not only to the perfume but to the glorious rule of His Majesty King Gajendravarma!”

A loud cheer rose from those present in the court as they all stood up with raised hands. Some of them complimented the royal poet for his statement and choice of words. Chandanprakash turned to the king and said: “What the poet laureate has said is very true. I’ve decided to name the perfume after you, your majesty. It’ll be called ‘Gajendra

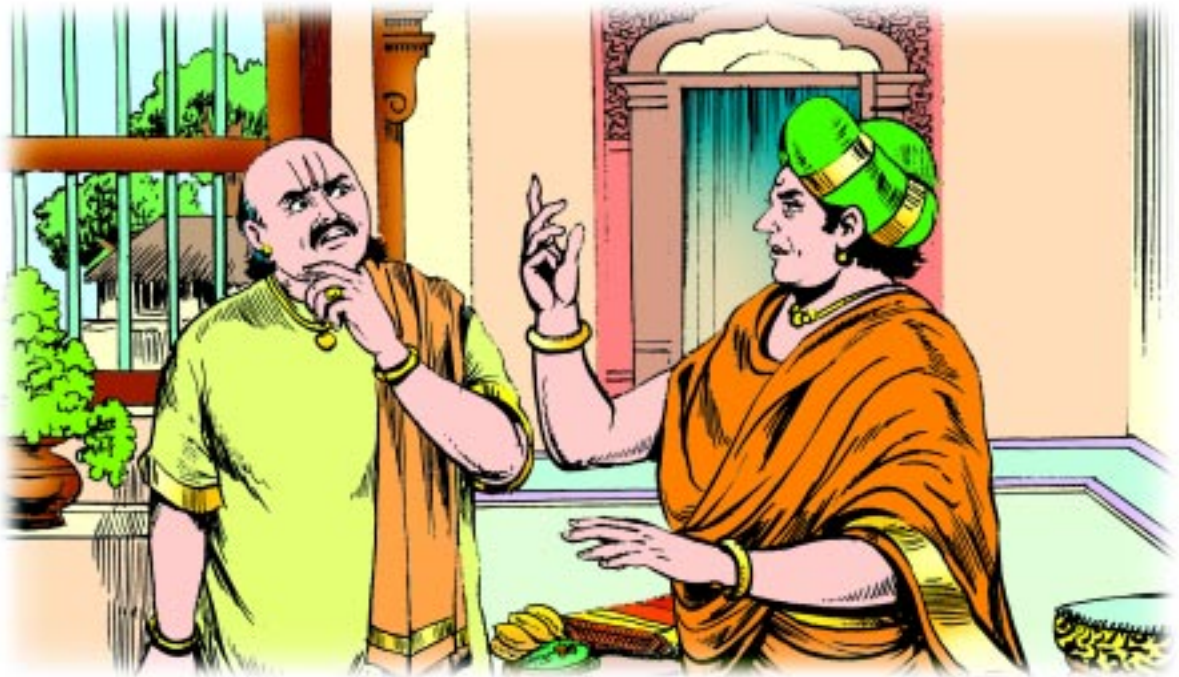
Attar'. I seek your approval." The king gave a nod as he took the bottle in his hands.

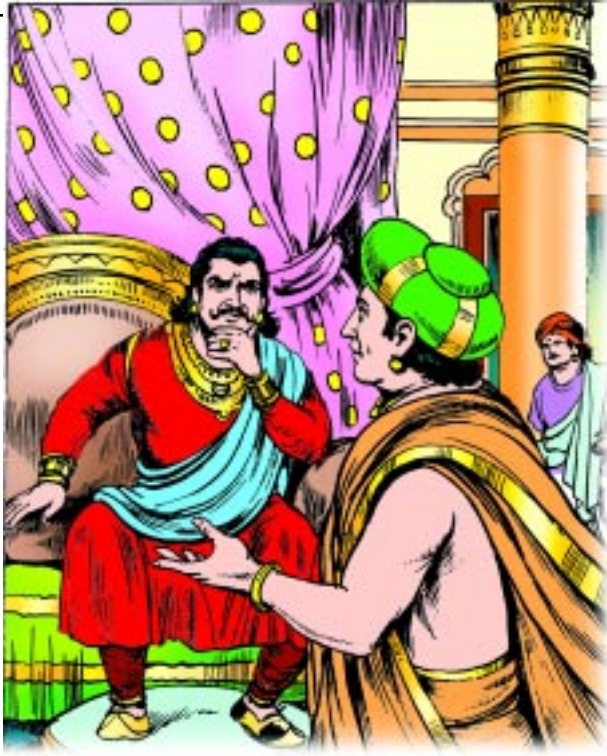
The perfume was in great demand from all over the kingdom, even from the inmates of the palace. Chandanprakash made a huge profit from the sale of Gajendra Attar. He thought the perfume had become popular because of its name, and he had been prompted to give it that name after he listened to the words of Anandbharati. He, therefore, attributed a major share of his success to the poet laureate and wished to express his gratitude.

One day, he invited Anandbharati to his residence and told him: "Sir, I owe the success of my venture to you. Only after listening to you that day

in the court in praise of our king did I think of naming the *attar* from Java after him. If only you would compose some lines about me, I can make use of them to promote the other products I have for sale." He then presented him with a costly silk shawl, some gold coins, and fruits on a tray.

Anandbharati was horrified. He waved away the tray and said, rather sternly: "Look here, my friend, nobody can dictate to a poet to write this or write that; nobody can bribe or induce him to do his bidding. A poet would write whenever he sees good in anything; if he finds anyone or anything bad, he will never spare that person, even if he happens to be the king. That's the kind of power we poets wield. Mind you, you cannot





ask me to write anything to serve your selfish interests.” Anandbharati left the place in a huff, leaving behind a dumbstruck Chandanprakash.

In no time, the conversation between the poet laureate and the perfume-vendor became the talk of the town. Anandbharati was looked upon in high esteem.

One year the kingdom of Gaganvihar was struck by drought and famine. There was an exodus to the neighbouring kingdoms. The ruler of one of them, Ajaysen, thought this was an opportune moment to attack and annex Gaganvihar.

When Gajendravarma came to know of the possibility of an attack on his kingdom, he thought he should not offer any resistance and, instead

he should come to terms with Ajaysen. He took the advice of his minister, who suggested that Anandbharati be sent as an emissary to Ajaysen. The poet was sent for, and when the king broached the subject with him, the poet laureate readily agreed.

Anandbharati started for the neighbouring kingdom. On reaching there, Ajaysen received him with all courtesy. “Anyone coming as an emissary should not be harmed, but treated with honour. I’ve already decided to annex your kingdom and I’m not changing my plans. But I shall listen to your views,” he said diplomatically.

“Your majesty, even before you heard the message sent by our king, you have disclosed your intention and decision. We do not wish to shed blood unnecessarily. As you know very well, if you keep the front door open, stray dogs would certainly enter your house. And at the first opportunity you will drive away the dogs. This is the state of affairs in our kingdom. Please remember, you may succeed in sneaking into our kingdom, but we will not lose an opportunity to drive you away. This is what our king has always taught us.”

Anandbharati’s words angered Ajaysen. However, he controlled his

feelings in front of the emissary and sent him away without harming him. Back in Gaganvihar, the poet laureate called on the king and described his meeting with King Ajaysen. He also advised Gajendravarma that they should give a fitting reply if Ajaysen were to attack their kingdom.

Once again, the meeting between Anandbharati and Ajaysen was widely discussed by the people of Gaganvihar. There was an upsurge of patriotic feeling in them, and they took a vow that they would even sacrifice their lives in resisting any attack by Ajaysen. People like Chandanprakash brought food items from the neighbouring kingdoms and distributed them freely among the people dying of hunger.

When Ajaysen's minister became aware of the moves in Gaganvihar, he

reminded the king of what the emissary had told him. If he were to retreat from Gaganvihar, he would be like the dog driven out of the house which he had strayed into. He advised Ajaysen not to contemplate any such foolish moves.

Ajaysen now realised what his people thought of his ambition. He sent an emissary to King Gajendravarma with the following message: "I have abandoned all plans of attacking your kingdom. In fact, I am grieved over the fact that Gaganvihar is passing through days of famine. I am sending food items for your people."

Ajaysen thus became a good friend of the people of Gaganvihar. They had only praise for the way the poet laureate succeeded in warding off an invasion by his choice of words.



Confusion worse confounded!

- ❁ *Reader **P. Ranga Jyothi** of Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh, wants to know the meaning of the idiom “sixes and sevens”.*

The correct expression is “at sixes and sevens”. When it refers to a place or event, it means everything is in a disorganised state. Like “When I returned home, I found the house at sixes and sevens.” If the expression refers to a person, it only means that he or she is full of feelings and thoughts which are confusing—as in “I was very worried. Everything seemed at sixes and sevens.”

- ❁ *What is the meaning of a “booby prize”? asks reader **Jyothiranjana Biswal** of Durgapur.*

A competition normally offers a first prize, as well as a second prize, and sometimes even a third prize, besides a few consolation prizes. If the competitor who comes last also is given a prize, it is called a booby prize which, of course, cannot be anything complimentary!

- ❁ *How can anyone pick somebody’s brain? wonders reader **Neelesh Kumar** of Amristar.*

That again is an informal expression when you seek the help of someone else to solve your problem, maybe because your brain does not function properly or that someone has better brains which you feel are capable of solving your problem!

- ❁ *Where does one use the idiom “by the seat of one’s pants”? asks **Malathi Rangarajan** of Neelankarai, Chennai.*

If you do something by the seat of your pants, it only means that you are relying on your own instinct and experience, instead of picking someone else’s brain, or using elaborate equipment or following a carefully prepared plan.

- ❁ ***Chitra Kamath** of Bangalore wants to know the meaning of the idiom “a pig in a poke”.*

You go to the market and want to buy a product but only after examining it, and if you are not allowed that freedom or facility, you go away saying you don’t wish to buy a pig in a poke. That means you don’t wish to indulge in a blind bargain. Got it?



A Royal Doubt

King Manavendra was slow in his comprehension. That made him harbour many doubts for which he would seek explanations. And if he was not satisfied, he would be quick in giving vent to his anger.

Mahadev was a renowned *pundit*, well-versed in the ancient texts. He was one day sent for by the king. He began narrating stories from mythology. After quoting examples, the scholar said, when people died, Yama Dharmaraja, ruler of the nether world, would decide where the dead should be sent. Some would be taken to *swarga*, the others were sent to *naraka*.

The king as usual had a doubt. “O learned scholar, we live on the earth and we can see the sky above us. Can we also see heaven and hell? Can you show them to me?”

Mahadev was now in a fix. He had

told the king about heaven and hell only in the context of life after death. When he himself had seen neither heaven nor hell, and as he had only read about them in the ancient texts, how could he show the king heaven and hell in any physical form?

The pundit was well aware that if he failed to give any satisfactory reply, his fate would be in the hands of the king. “To show you heaven or hell, your majesty, is a difficult proposition, though not entirely impossible. I would only request that I be given some time to study the texts thoroughly before coming back with a more practical answer,” he said.

The king reposed much faith in the pundit. “All right, you may go now, but I shall be waiting for you to show me heaven and hell.”

Mahadev bowed low and hurried out of the palace and rushed back to



Loknath now sat up. She gave him the details, though she herself did not know that her husband the pundit himself had failed to satisfy the king.

The words heaven and hell rang in Loknath's mind for a

his village. After a few days, he left his village on a long pilgrimage.

King Manavendra waited for a few days, and when there was no sign of Mahadev, he began raising his doubt with whoever called on him. Unfortunately, nobody was able to give him a satisfactory reply. By now, word had spread about the king's doubt and of the possibility of earning his pleasure if one were to go to him with an explanation.

Mahadev had a son, Loknath. He paid no heed to words of advice or admonition from his mother. One day, she was desperate. He was sitting idle in front of her while she was busy with the grinding stone. "It's a shame, Loknath, that you have become a good-for-nothing fellow. You don't want to be of any service to anybody nor will you do anything to help yourself. Remember you're a pundit's son. Why don't you go and try to solve the king's problem? Who knows he will not load you with awards and rewards?"

long time as he sat there staring at the grinding stone. Suddenly, he said, "Mother, I think I know the answer. Let me go and try to meet the king."

On reaching the palace gates, Loknath told the guards that he wished to meet the king. "As if his majesty would meet anybody and everybody who comes to the palace!" they said with a sneer. "Young man! Look at yourself! Your dress is dirty, your hair is dishevelled, and you've an ugly smell around! Better make yourself scarce, I tell you!" said the chief of the guards.

"But I've the answer to the king's doubt!" said Loknath. "I can show him heaven and hell!"

The mention of the two words put the guards on alert. "All right, you may go in, but better be warned. If you are not able to satisfy the king, you'll not go back to your village alive!"

One of the soldiers took Loknath to the king who took one look at him and began laughing. "You say you

have the answer to my doubt? But you don't seem to have seen the portals of any school!"

Loknath merely stood with folded hands. "Your majesty, I'm the son of a pundit and I've the answer, and you'll be satisfied when you listen to me!"

Though amused, the king ordered the court to assemble. Loknath took a look at those present in the court and said: "If you all will permit me, I would prefer to demonstrate my answer. Let a grinding stone be brought to the court."

There was a hushed silence till a grinding stone was brought and placed on a table in front of the king. Loknath poured some rice on the grinder and began grinding. He once again glanced at everybody and said in a loud voice: "The wheel of the grinder is the sky; the base is the earth. The rice I put for grinding represents the people. It is God who places the people on the grinder." He then rotated

the wheel once. "All those who had committed sins during their lives have come out of the grinder. They are the ones who are in hell. There is some rice still left on top of the wheel. Take them as those who will go to the heaven."

Loknath stopped for a moment and looked at first the courtiers and then the king who was now smiling. "Ah! That's quite convincing. Did you say you're the son of a pundit? Tell me, who's he?"

"His name is Mahadev, your majesty!" replied Loknath, bowing low. "You may recall that you had posed your doubt first to my father."

"So, you are Mahadev's son, are you?" exclaimed King Manavendra. "After all, a tiger will never beget a cat!" The king took off one of his pearl necklaces and gave it to Loknath.

After he returned to his village, Loknath took to a serious study of the ancient texts, wishing to become a pundit like his father.





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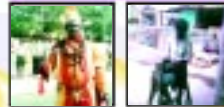
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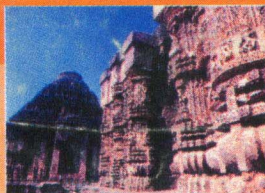
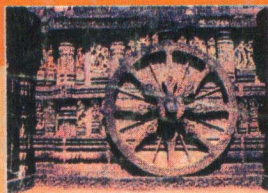
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The Sun Temple : Konark

"Where the language of man has been defeated by the language of stone"

-Rabindranath Tagore



For more information contact: Director, Tourism, Paryatan Bhavan, Bhubaneswar-751014, Orissa, India

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